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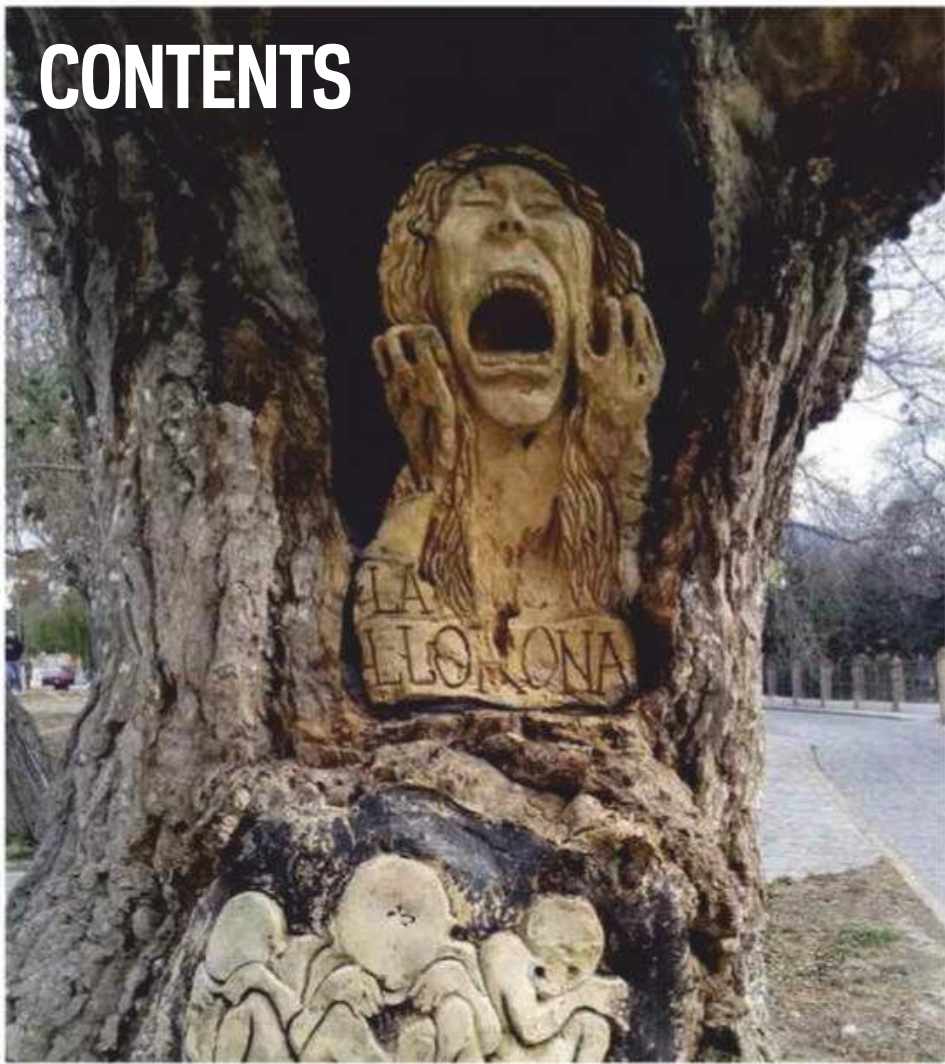
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CONTENTS



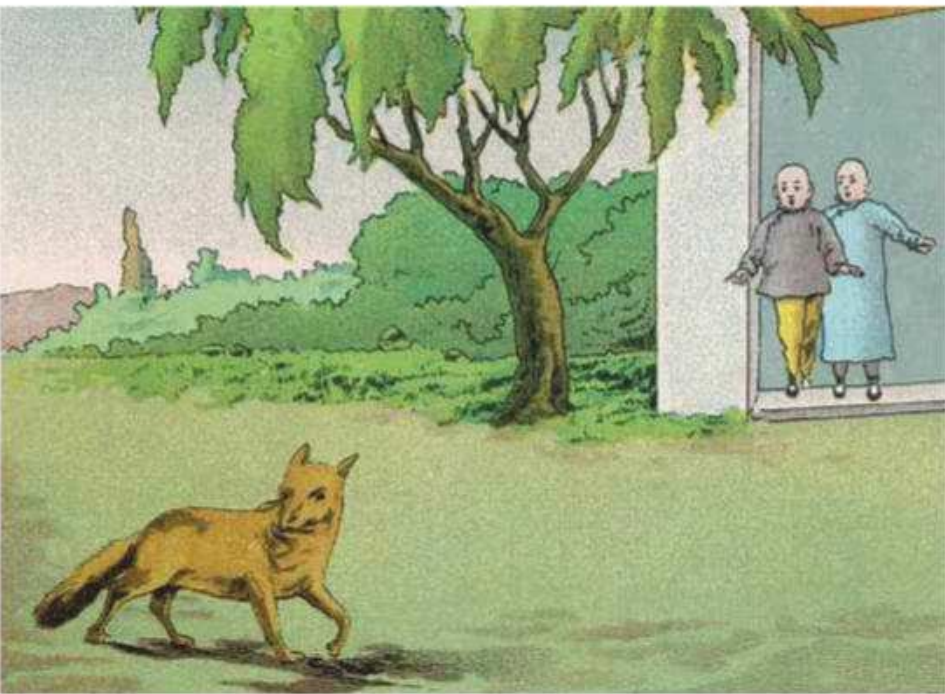
49 *Curse of the Crying Woman: the legend of La Llorona*



6 *King of the carrots*



38 *Tajikistan apeman expedition*



52 *Spirit foxes and magic weasels*



FORTEAN TIMES 373

Why fortean ?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE
78

STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: Croydon Cat Killer, squirrel kings, Hitler's teeth, Planet X, and sea monster hoax...

14 SCIENCE
16 ARCHÆOLOGY
17 CLASSICAL CORNER

23 ALIEN ZOO
26 NECROLOG
28 THE UFO FILES

FEATURES

30 COVER STORY CHANGELINGS

Stories of the supernatural abduction of children span the centuries. Gods and aliens have been blamed, but the most common culprits are fairies. **JOSHUA CUTCHIN** explores their practice of replacing human infants with their own offspring.

38 IF YOU WERE THE ONLY GUL IN THE WORLD

RICHARD FREEMAN and company carry on up the Romit Valley in search of some aggressive and rapey apemen (and women) – the fabled and rather terrifying guls of Tajikistan...

44 APOCALYPSE COW!

Why has the birth of a cow got Jews excited about the potential rebuilding of Jerusalem's Temple and Christian End Timers looking forward to the Last Days? **TED HARRISON** investigates the Jewish prophecy of the Red Heifer Without Blemish.

REPORTS

54 BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

Earth Lights Revelation **THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE**

76 FORTEAN TRAVELLER

The Leprechaun Museum, Dublin **NIGEL WATSON**

FORUM

49 The curse of the crying woman **JAMES RILEY**

50 The Angels of Mons: A soldier's story **DAVID CLARKE**

52 Spirit foxes and magic weasels **CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE**

REGULARS

02 EDITORIAL
57 REVIEWS

71 LETTERS
78 READER INFO

79 PHENOMENOMIX
80 STRANGE DEATHS

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

CHANGES AND CHANGELINGS

THE FATE OF THE FTMB

Some of you will be aware that the Fortean Times Message Board, our online forum, which has acted as a meeting place for forteans for nearly 20 years, is no more. By the time you read this, the FTMB will have closed down (as if by some cruel irony, on midnight on Hallowe'en). Dennis Publishing took the decision to shut the forum in reponse to the legal problems it posed in relation to the new General Data Protection Regulations and the EU Copyright Directive. Obviously, we were saddened by the decision, even while we could see the rationale behind it; after all, the FTMB has remained a true community, an island of friendly discussion in a sea of online shoutyness, and a repository of valuable fortean material.

Despite initial fears that this was the end of the line, we can now tell you that all is not lost. Thanks to the hard work and quick thinking of the forum mods, and the co-operation of our publishers, it looks as if the FTMB will rise again. If all goes according to plan, this will be sooner rather than later, and we hope to bring you full details next issue: watch this space.

CURIOUS CRADLE SNATCHERS

As Joshua Cutchin points out in his new book, *Thieves in the Night*, two themes that run disturbingly through centuries of forteana are the supernatural abduction of children and the interest shown by denizens of the otherworld in all aspects of human sexuality and reproduction. That chronicler of high strangeness, John Keel, certainly noted both of these phenomena in his work. "Children vanish more frequently than any other group," he wrote in 1971's *Our Haunted Planet*. And West Virginia's Mothman – the perplexing entity at the centre of Keel's best-known work, displayed "a penchant for scaring females who were menstruating" during its 1966-1967 reign of terror. From the biblical Nephilim to the fairies of the British Isles, the *duendes* of South America or the duppies of Jamaica, there is a very long line of supernatural beings who appear fixated on interbreeding with humans and/or stealing their offspring; and it's a theme that has continued to haunt modern accounts of anomalous encounters

in the form of alien abduction lore, with its emphasis on reproductive experimentation and hybridisation.

Cutchin's lengthy survey is dense and exhaustive – we'll be bringing you a full review next issue, but it's recommended reading – and in this issue you'll find a taster in our cover feature (p30), a survey of the folklore of changelings, those bad tempered, insatiably hungry and frequently hideous fairy children left by the little people

to replace human infants snatched from the cradle. As if to illustrate the centrality of these themes to fortean enquiry, echoes of them appear elsewhere in this issue: Richard Freeman goes in search of the over-sexed *guls* of Tajikistan, yeti-like creatures whose main aim seems to be to mate with humans (p38); and Nigel Watson visits one of Dublin's odder attractions, the National Leprechaun Museum (p76). In other odd abduction news, we bring you the story of

a gay penguin couple who kidnapped a chick to raise as their own; penguin changelings appear not to have been involved.

HUNT EMERSON HONOURED

We'd like to congratulate our resident cartoonist Hunt Emerson, whose inimitable work has been a mainstay of this magazine for over 40 years, on an award he recently picked up. At this year's Lakes International Comic Art Festival in Kendal, Cumbria, Hunt was announced the 2018 winner of the Sergio Aragonés International Award for Excellence in Comic Art, presented annually to an exceptional comic artist or cartoonist. Hunt, who has numerous other cartooning trophies on his mantelpiece, was the second winner of the award, which was established in 2017 by the National Cartoonist's Society. The legendary Sergio Aragonés congratulated Hunt by video message from California, saying: "Hunt is probably one of the great cartoonists of our generation... I'm so proud he's getting this Award – it is so, so well deserved." A sentiment with which all of us at Fortean Towers concur wholeheartedly.



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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

GAY PENGUIN KIDNAPPERS!

Plus penguin shortage leads to plastic replacements at Telford Exotic Zoo



ABOVE: The gay penguin couple (right) huddle round their adopted chick when confronted by the youngster's birth parents at Odense Zoo in Denmark.

Two male king penguins at Odense Zoo in Denmark “kidnapped” the chick of a rival pair they thought was being neglected. Penguins are known to form homosexual relationships just like humans. The incident led to a raucous battle between the grown-up birds. Zookeeper Sandie Hedegard Munck blamed the chick’s biological father. “I went to the enclosure and could see something was wrong,” she said. “The parents were gone and their offspring had been kidnapped. The female is very caring for the kid. I think she had been out to get her bath, and it had been the male’s turn to care for the kid. He may have then left and the [gay] couple thought, ‘It’s a pity, we’ll take it’”. Footage showed the mother later squawking in distress as she tries to reclaim her baby, while the gay couple huddle round it. The dispute was settled after the zoo returned the chick

to its parents. However, the episode had a happy ending for the aspiring fathers: the zoo gave them an egg from a new mother who was too ill to look after her offspring.

Another male penguin couple, Magic and Sphen, are incubating a foster egg in their impressive nest Down Under. The duo developed a strong bond and became inseparable before breeding season at Sea Life Sydney Aquarium in Australia, waddling around and going for swims together. As spring approached, the gentoo penguins started collecting ice pebbles to create a nest and gathered more pebbles than any other couple. After they showed parenting prowess with a dummy egg, keepers gave them an egg from a heterosexual penguin couple that had two. At the time of the news report, they were swapping duties daily, one doing his best to incubate the egg while the other patrolled the

nest’s perimeter, warding off potential pebble thieves or over-inquisitive neighbours. While Sphenare is older and excellent at incubating, Magic is younger and still learning. *D.Mail*, 28 Sept; (Sydney) *D.Telegraph*, 29 Sept, 13 Oct 2018.

- Gay penguin couples have successfully reared chicks in zoos before. In 2009, for instance, a couple called Z and Vielpunkt in Bremerhaven Zoo, Germany, reared a chick rejected by its biological parents. Then, four years ago at Wingham Wildlife Park in Kent, another gay penguin couple reared an abandoned chick. Staff stepped in after the baby bird’s mother had to leave the egg because the father refused to help her incubate it. The two male Humboldt penguins, Jumbs and Kermit, were given the egg, which hatched on 12 April 2014. Park owner Tony Binskin said: “These two have so far proven to be two of the best penguin parents we have had.” There have also been stories of homosexual vultures and bisexual polyamorous geese with similar outcomes. *BBC News*, 3 June 2009, 14 May 2014.

- Guishan Zoo in Guangxi province, southern China, which opened on 25 November 2017, was forced to shut down after exhibiting fake penguins as the real thing. Pictures of the zoo posted by *People’s Daily Online* showed more than 10 inflatable penguins, along with real but unimpressive “rare wildlife” such as chickens and geese. Tourists had to pay 15 yuan (£1.68) per person to visit the zoo, which claimed to feature

“penguins from the South Pole” and a fortune tortoise. There was a crocodile pond with a warning sign saying the crocodile could hurt people – but a live tortoise could be seen living in the pond, along with a pop-up penguin. The unnamed zoo owner claimed the poultry were not part of the attraction, but were there to be fed to the crocodile. Punters raged that they were being treated as “idiots” and demanded a refund. *dailymail.co.uk*, 4 Dec 2017.

- Telford Exotic Zoo in Shropshire, which first opened in July 2017, spent months building a penguin enclosure and was expecting a delivery of six Humboldt penguins in time for the summer holidays, but that was before an outbreak of avian malaria swept through the UK. Owner Scott Adams said zoos depend on penguins bred in the UK and Europe to protect those in the wild and to monitor the gene pool. “Lots of zoos, if not most zoos, have lost a lot of penguins and in some case most of their stock,” he said. “Penguins only mate once a year, so we’ve got to sit back and let nature take its course until the numbers build up in the UK and Europe.” The enclosure at the zoo is too specialised to be adapted for other animals, so the zoo will make do with plastic models of various penguin species until it can get real live birds, probably next year.

Avian malaria is endemic in wild domestic birds and is transmitted by the *Anopheles* mosquito. It can be fatal to species that haven’t evolved resistance to the disease, such as penguins. Penguins have never had to build immunity to it, as they live on or near the sea where the *Anopheles* mosquito does not occur. *BBC News*, 1 Oct; *telegraph.co.uk*, *businessinsider.com*, 3 Oct 2018.



SKULL-DUGGERY

Skulls stolen from Hythe's famous ossuary

PAGE 12



CLASSICAL CATS

Pussies galore from Ancient Egypt to Rome

PAGE 17



MIGHTY MOP-TOP

Super hairy baby Chanco rules Internet

PAGE 25

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

Mainstream media have been flirting openly with conspiracy theory in recent years, but the reasons for this may be deeper, and more consequential, than we thought, says **NOEL ROONEY**

THE BIG SORT

In previous columns, I've commented on the increasing presence of conspiracy theory material in the mainstream media. At the time, I suggested this migration of a hitherto marginal phenomenon into the centre of the public domain was a consequence of the need for media outlets to attract quick clicks for advertising revenue; and I still think this is a core factor in the Conspirasphere's odd lurch into the spotlight. However, there may also be deeper cultural reasons behind this attachment of fringe ideas and beliefs to our information gatekeepers.

These cultural shifts are most obvious in the USA, although they are clearly happening in Europe and other parts of the world. The surface symptoms are the rise of populist political parties and leaderships, and the increasing (and increasingly baleful, some might say) influence of fake news – and the perception of fake news – on the cultural mainstream, but the underlying reasons are a little more primal, involving tribal loyalties and their effect on demographics both physical and psychic. The hardening of political boundaries into tribal enclaves was first described, in the USA, in a book called *The Big Sort*, by Bill Bishop, in 2008. Bishop claimed that communities of interest were becoming reified to the extent that they were reflected in geography. Towns and counties were increasingly inhabited by communities with common political, and often religious, viewpoints, to the exclusion of others.

Some of Bishop's evidence was skewed and inaccurate, but his basic thesis struck a chord with commentators who had observed that election results in many areas had solidified; once a Republican area, always a Republican area, and likewise for Democrats.

In addition, many commentators have observed that the boundaries between left and right have not just become more clearly defined; they have changed the character of those groupings. The right has shifted further to the right, and the

extreme right has both grown and become more influential on Republican thought as a whole. More recently, the term 'tribal epistemology' has gained some currency, as a way of understanding the mechanics of post-truth America. This is in some respects an intellectual/emotional version of the big sort: in essence, it suggests that people will only accept information from those sources that they see as sharing a worldview; information from outside this worldview is by definition wrong, and is automatically discounted. In a cultural atmosphere where tribal epistemology influences what people accept as fact, and what they dismiss as fake news, the landscape of fact and fiction undergoes a transformation into new realms of strangeness.

And what does this mean for the Conspirasphere? First, the alt-right (and thus via tribal epistemology, the right in general) sees much conspiracy theory as simple fact; if someone influential in the tribe claims that Pizzagate represents real evidence of real crime, then a very large number of people on the right accept the claim and subsume it into their viewpoint. This changes the status of conspiracy theory, elevates it into a kind of mainstream; gives it a kind of oxygen it has rarely enjoyed. Second, this elevation in status creates a heightened incentive for the propagation of conspiracy theory; it encourages conspiracy theorists to get their material out there, because there appears to be an audience for it, one that is no longer on the margins of society. Third, this inevitably proffers an invitation to tricksters and hoaxers to create and disseminate spoof material, with a better than average chance that the story, no matter how outrageous or palpably untrue, will be accepted into the tribal lore; a tribe already prepared by their elders to believe that bizarre claims represent real evidence. www.thebigsort.com; www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/3/22/14762030/donald-trump-tribal-epistemology

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

GIANT ICICLE HITS ENERGY MINISTER

<i> 6 Dec 2014.

Dancing cows star in new dark comedy

(Wolverhampton) Express & Star, 26 Feb 2018.

LABOR WINS BATTLE FOR BATMAN

Sunday Canberra Times, 18 Mar 2018.

Tribunal rules decapitated baby doctor can return to work

BBC News, 5 June 2018.

BLOOD CLOTS MORE LIKELY IN HOSPITAL THAN FLYING

Irish Times, 20 July 2018.

Dogs 'try to help upset owners'

<i> 24 July 2018.

BUCKET SAVES MAN FROM FALLING METAL

Toronto Star, 27 July 2018.

KING OF THE CARROTS

Ian Neale poses with his 4.29 kg carrot which won the the heaviest carrot competition on the first day of the Harrogate Autumn Flower Show held at the Great Yorkshire Showground, in Harrogate, on 14 September 2018. He also took the heaviest cabbage prize with his wheelbarrow-borne 30.2kg whopper, while Graham Barrat tasted victory with his 319.8kg pumpkin. **PHOTOS: OLIE SCARFE/GETTY IMAGES**







SIDELINES...

CURRY CURSE

Business was booming at Manohar Kunwar's Nepalese diner in Tansley, Derbyshire, until it was hit by power cuts, gas problems, flickering lights, fewer customers and bad reviews. We started to think there was some witchcraft," said Manohar, 45, "maybe by a rival." In August, he found a three-headed snake statue hidden in the restaurant. After he threw it away, business picked up. *Sun*, 10 Sept 2018.

GOOSE FALL

Over 50 dead geese were found in an Idaho Falls parking lot, with more discovered on nearby rooftops, bringing the total to at least 112. Conservation officers believe the geese were struck by lightning during a severe hail and thunderstorm. *Fox 13 (Salt Lake City)*, 9 April, idahostatesman.com, 10 April 2018.

BURGLING BADGER

A badger crept into a house in Linlithgow, West Lothian, and ate a pet cat's food before falling asleep in its bed. The animal was spotted after sneaking in through the cat flap and was found by animal welfare officers curled up asleep. *<i>209 Oct 2017.*

DADDY DOG

A 10-year-old Labrador called Fred raised nine orphaned ducklings after their mother duck was killed by a fox – probably. The unusual family live at Mountfitchet Castle in Essex, home to a model Norman village. The Goldsmith family, who own the attraction, said it was just like Fred to "play mum". When Fred goes swimming, the ducklings follow his lead and get in the water too. *[PA]* 22 May 2018.



MARTIN ROSS

DEFINITELY DEAD

Hitler's gnashers prove the Führer isn't just pining for the fjords



FRED RAMAGE / KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Berlin, 1945: Soviet troops show Allied war correspondents the grave in which Adolf Hitler's charred body is alleged to have been buried.

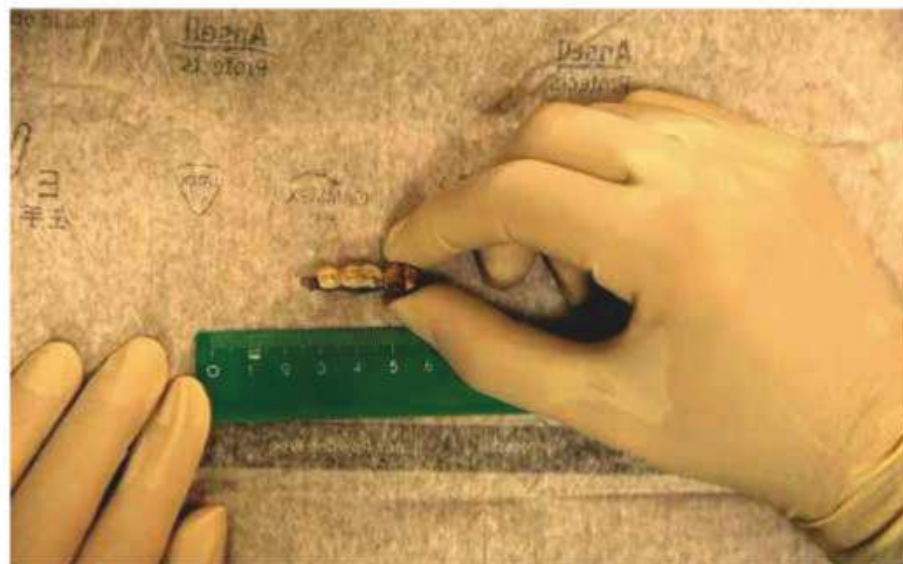
Almost from the moment Hitler died, a cottage industry of conspiracy theories sprang up to say he was still alive. In *Berlin: The Downfall*, Antony Beevor described how Stalin had been keen to reassure himself that Hitler was dead, but equally keen to hide this news from his supposed allies Britain and America. Instead, *Pravda* said rumours that Hitler's body had been found were a fascist provocation. The Soviet authorities spread the "alternative fact" that Hitler was alive and well and being looked after by the treacherous Americans in their zone of occupation. Stalin even misled his commander-in-chief Marshal Zhukov by berating him over the supposed failure to find Hitler's body. This may help explain why, when a group of high-ranking RAF officers tried to visit Hitler's bunker in 1946, they found it locked and guarded by an NCO from the NKVD secret police, who told them that Hitler had escaped and was now in hiding in Argentina. Hence Hitler was "spotted" emerging from a German U-boat in Argentina with Eva Braun in 1945; and surrounded by adoring fugitive Nazis in 1950s Columbia; and also approaching the end of his days in the 1980s as a happy nonagenarian with a younger Brazilian girlfriend.

Many other "sightings" were reported in the *Weekly World News* and similar paragons of reliable information.

However, in March and July 2017 French scientists were allowed to examine a lower jaw kept in the archives of Russia's secret police (now called the FSB). The analysis published in the peer-reviewed *European Journal of Internal Medicine* last May convincingly supports the narrative that Hitler killed himself on 30 April 1945, SS soldiers burnt his body, Soviet troops found the charred remains, and the jawbone ended up in Moscow. Professor Philippe Charlier, lead author of the research, said the jawbone has been compared with Hitler's dental records, including X-rays

made in 1944, thus allowing him to be identified by his false teeth. Despite being only 56 when he died, Hitler had just five of his own teeth left. "We first identified him by his dentures, which were extremely unusual, in completely extraordinary shapes," said Prof Charlier. "There was a perfect anatomical and technological correspondence... Our study proves that Hitler died in 1945." Electron microscope analysis of tiny samples from Hitler's few remaining real teeth found no traces of meat (consistent with his vegetarianism). The state of the dentures tallied with the traditionally accepted account that Hitler took cyanide before a bullet was fired into his skull. Bluish deposits probably indicate a chemical reaction between the cyanide and the metal dentures.

The research renders obsolete a 2009 study that claimed a skull fragment with a bullet hole – stored in the Russian State Archive in Moscow and claimed to be Hitler's – was from a woman (though not Eva Braun). Professor Charlier recently examined the fragment and concluded it was from a man, but in any case, its origin is now seen to be immaterial to the fate of Herr Schicklgruber. If he *was* still with us, he would be an unlikely 129 years old. See *The Death of Hitler: The Final Word* by Jean-Christophe Brisard and Lana Parshina (Da Capo Press). *Independent*, 20 May; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 May; *New York Post*, 4 Sept 2018.



PHILIPPE CHARLIER / TWITTER

ABOVE: Hitler's teeth were examined by Professor Philippe Charlier last year.



SQUIRREL KINGS

The knotty problem of hopelessly entangled rodents happily solved



WISCONSIN HUMANE SOCIETY



A US wildlife centre saved five young grey squirrels after their tails became dangerously fused together. The siblings had become entangled with the grass and plastic strips their mother used to build the family nest. They were taken to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre at the Wisconsin Humane Society, which worked to save their tails and possibly their lives. The five were cut free with scissors while under anaesthetic. Squirrels need their tails for balance and warmth, so it was important to try to preserve them as much as possible, the centre said on its Facebook page.

"You can imagine how wiggly

and unruly (and nippy!) this frightened, distressed ball of squirrely energy was, so our first step was to anaesthetise all five of them at the same time," the centre said. "With that accomplished, we began working on unravelling the Gordian Knot of tightly tangled tails and nest material. It was impossible to tell whose tail was whose, and we were increasingly concerned because all of them had suffered from varying degrees of tissue damage to their tails caused by circulatory impairment."

After about 20 minutes of careful cutting the knot began to undo and the squirrels were left to recover from the



NEBRASKA HUMANE SOCIETY

TOP: A Gordian Knot of young squirrels. LEFT: Anaesthetised and disentangled. ABOVE: The Nebraska squirrel king.

anaesthetic. "Now, one day later, they are all bright-eyed, and three of the five are 'bushy-tailed', but we'll need to monitor all of them for a couple of days to watch for tail necrosis caused by impaired blood flow," the centre said.

Another squirrel king was reported from Elkhorn, Nebraska, in May this year, when six baby squirrels were found tied at the tail and had to be disentangled by the Nebraska Humane Society. *Wichita Eagle*, 16 May; *BBC News*, *theguardian.com*, 17 Sept 2018.

For earlier squirrel kings, see FT45:36, 46:3, 63:13, 104:11, 300:14, 355:25. For a rat king, see FT237:22.

SIDELINES...

FOX ATTACKS

A fox bit Gill McMahon, 77, on the finger while she was reading the paper at home in Little Chesterford, Essex, breaking a bone. She leapt up and screamed, the fox let go, and bit her other hand. Soon after, on 7 August, Heidi Cooper, three, was bitten on the arm in bed by a fox in Orpington, Kent. It had entered through the back door left open in the heat wave. Last February, a fox bit seven-month-old Raeya Wyatt on her hand and foot at her home in Plymouth. *D.Express*, *D.Mail*, 13 Aug 2018.

SANDAL SCAM

A six-hour stakeout to catch thieves who had stolen 40 pairs of sandals from a neighbourhood in Kyoto discovered that the culprits were a pair of sly foxes. Five police officers were involved in the operation. *<i>2 June 2018.*

ALBINO WALLABY

While travelling from Aldbourne, Wiltshire, towards Axford on 2 June, Valerie Hood photographed an albino wallaby leaping along Stock Lane near Marlborough. "It crossed the road in front of us, looked around at us and went off into the bushes," she said. Wiltshire Police said it has had no reports of wallaby-related incidents. *BBC News*, 3 June 2018.

A & EATING

The food at a hospital in Miso, Japan, is so good that people are feigning sickness just so that they can eat there. *Sun on Sunday*, 3 June 2018.

BOXED IN #1

A Californian couple were arrested after police found their three children living in a 20ft (6m) by 10ft (3m) plywood box in the desert near Joshua Tree. The youngsters, aged 11, 13 and 14, had been forced to live in squalid conditions for four years. *Sun*, 3 Mar 2018.

BOXED IN #2

A Japanese man was arrested for keeping his son in a 6x3x3ft (2x1x1m) wooden cage for the past 20 years. Yoshitane Yamasaki, 73, told police he had started confining his son from the age of 16, when the boy began displaying mental problems and "bad behaviour". *Times*, 9 April 2018.



SIDELINES...

STRANGE OHIO BREAK-IN

Mindy Marshall returned to her house in Giarard, Ohio, on 30 July to find her taxidermic animals staring back at her. Someone had broken in, stolen items including a stereo system and put her stuffed deer head in a box. A boar's head had been moved and a cold beer had been placed in a raccoon's hands. *WKBN (Columbus, OH), 30 July 2018.*

TRAVELLING BOOK

A 1956 Stanley Gibbons's Postage Stamp Catalogue, found by 74-year-old volunteer Gil Oakley as she tidied the bookshelves of Hope House charity shop in Church Stretton, Shropshire, was inscribed by her father, stamp specialist Kenneth Gleave, who died in 1968 in Kent. Ms Oakley hopes to discover how the book journeyed 200 miles over the last 50 years to be reunited with her. *Times, 2 April 2018.*

POLLY PRANK

A pet parrot called 999 for Yorkshire emergency services using its beak. A policewoman tweeted: "Dispatcher called back and female answers apologising profusely as her parrot had her phone." *D.Star, 20 July 2018.*

MOOSE'S REVENGE

A hunter was hospitalised with a hoof-shaped bruise on his forehead after an encounter with a moose in Newfoundland. Rodney Buffet was inspecting a bull he had shot. "I just thought it was the nerves going out of his body," he said when he saw the wounded animal moving. *<i>18 Oct 2017.*

FAMILY VALUES

An abstract painting by Christopher Wool, valued at £2million, was vandalised by a black-clad man with a fake beard, wielding a razor. An attendant at the Aspen, Colorado, gallery identified him as Nicholas Morley, 40, part-owner of the painting with his father, Harold, 73, a former Manchester dentist resident in Barbados. Although an arrest warrant was issued, Morley senior refused to claim insurance, instead suggesting the painting be repaired and put on the market to capitalise on its newfound fame. *D.Mail, 4 May 2018.*

NAME GAMES | A local paper gets to the bottom of the news and a black sheep wears her name with pride

PROCTOLOGISTS TAKE HEED



A small Missouri town has a new newspaper called the *Uranus Examiner*. Its launch was announced on 12 September, just days after GateHouse Media said it

was closing Pulaski County's local paper, the *Daily Guide*. The first issue of the *Uranus Examiner* was scheduled for late October. In a statement posted on Facebook, the

publication said it would be available for free to residents of Pulaski County. Its editor, Natalie Sanders, ran the *Daily Guide* before leaving last June to start what she calls a "fun" paper that will include local news and promote the tourist town of Uranus, which is pronounced the way any self-respecting class clown would say it.

Uranus sits along historic Route 66 and is known for quirky attractions, including a fudge shop and the world's largest belt buckle. Luge Hardman, the mayor of nearby Waynesville, where the *Daily Guide* was based, says he thinks the "innuendo" surrounding the new publication's name will bring "public ridicule." *[AP] 13 Sept; BBC News, 14 Sept 2018. D.Mail, 7 July 2018.*

LAMB LABELLED

A black female lamb, a crossbreed between a Jacob sheep and a Lleyn, was born on Good Friday 2018. James Stevenage, 13, noticed markings on its fleece that appeared to spell the word 'lamb'. It was one of four black sheep on his family's farm in Edge, near Stroud, Gloucestershire. "When I saw the lamb," he said, "at first it looked like it said 'I am Y'. But when I looked again it looked like it said 'lamb'. We were moving the lambs between fields when I spotted it. My mum and dad have been here for seven years and they've never seen anything like it." The family have 11 lambs in total, and James's parents, Michael and Jo, farm for a hobby. *Western Daily Press, 14 April; metro.co.uk, 16 April 2018.*





LAST MAN STANDING

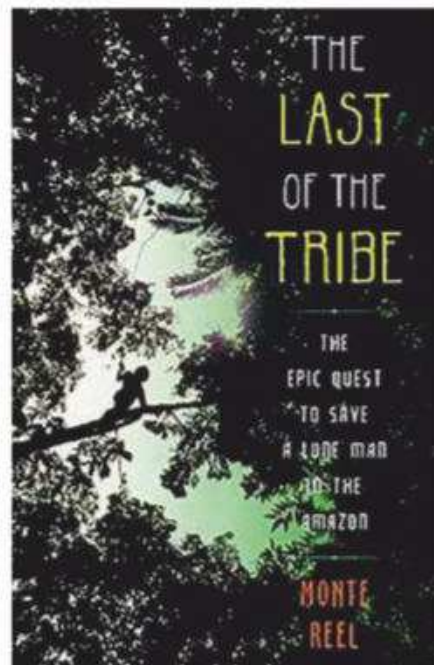
The lone survivor of an uncontacted Amazon tribe



For 22 years, officials have been tracking a man believed to be the lone survivor of an isolated indigenous tribe in the Brazilian Amazon. Though infrequently seen, he leaves traces of his life: a footprint here, a chopped tree there, patches of planted papaya and corn. Recently, officials released a shaky video of the man, offering a rare glimpse of an uncontacted tribesman. Brazil's National Indian Foundation, or Funai, recorded the brief video clip in 2011, but only made it public recently. Shot from a distance, it shows the man, dressed in a loincloth, hacking at a tree with an axe. There is only one other known image of the man, captured by a filmmaker for a 1998 documentary called *Corumbiara*. It shows his partially obscured face peering out from behind a cluster of thick foliage.

The man, who appears to be in his late 50s, lives in the jungles of the north-west state of Rondônia and has been called "the loneliest man in the world". He belonged to a group of six – five of whom were killed by ranchers in 1995. The majority of his tribe is thought to have been decimated in the 1970s and 1980s, after a road was built nearby, causing a rise in demand for land for business purposes. His tribe has never been named, and it is not known what language they used. For years, the Brazilian media has dubbed him *o indio do buraco* ("the man of the hole"), because he leaves behind deep ditches, used to trap animals or to hide. He hunts forest pigs, birds and monkeys. In the past, he

In his 50s, he has been called "the loneliest man in the world"



has abandoned straw huts and handmade tools, such as resin torches and arrows. Each hut has a pit in the centre, maybe for self-defence or for some kind of ritual.

Funai has made several attempts to contact him, but he made it clear that he is not interested, even wounding an official with an arrow in 2005. Funai has been monitoring him from afar, leaving him seeds and tools. It needs to show he is still alive to renew a restriction order on the Tanaru Indigenous Reserve, which was set up in 2015 and spans around 8,070 hectares (20,000 acres). It is surrounded by private farms

LEFT: The brief video clip shows the loincloth-clad man chopping a tree with an axe.

and deforested clearings, but regulations forbid anyone from entering and endangering him.

Under the Brazilian constitution, indigenous people have a right to land. "They have to keep proving that this man exists," said Fiona Watson of Survival International. "There is also a political motivation for releasing the video. Congress is dominated by agribusiness; Funai has had its budget slashed. There is a big assault on indigenous rights going on in the country." Farmers and illegal loggers still want the man's land. He could also find himself confronted by "pistoleros" (guns-for-hire), patrolling the area for cattle ranchers. In 2009, a temporary camp erected by Funai monitors was ransacked by an armed group; and in 2017 10 members of an uncontacted tribe were massacred by illegal gold miners in a remote region along the Jandiatuba River. As logging, mining and farming industries push deeper into the Amazon, the 113 uncontacted tribes that live in Brazil have been facing acute threats to their existence. A major concern is disease; it is not unusual for 50 per cent of a tribe to be wiped out by foreign illnesses – flu, measles, etc – within the first year of contact.

Last May, the team that monitors the man in the video saw signs – footprints and a cut tree – indicating that he is still alive. He has been the subject of various research reports, press articles and a book, *The Last of the Tribe: The Epic Quest to Save a Lone Man in the Amazon* by US journalist Monte Reel. "He is the ultimate symbol of resilience and resistance," said Fiona Watson, "but we are witnessing genocide in real time. Once he's gone, his people will have disappeared forever, along with all their history and knowledge." *BBC News*, 20 July; *Guardian*, Sun, 21 July; *smithsonianmag.com*, 23 July; *D.Mail*, 18 Aug 2018.

SIDELINES...

FIRESTARTERS 1

While trying to burn a "huge wolf spider" he had found in his flat in Redding, California, a man might have accidentally set light to his entire apartment block. Officials believe a blowtorch probably started the conflagration, which caused \$11,000 (£8,000) of damages. It is not clear whether the spider survived. *BBC News*, 9 Jan 2018.

FIRESTARTERS 2

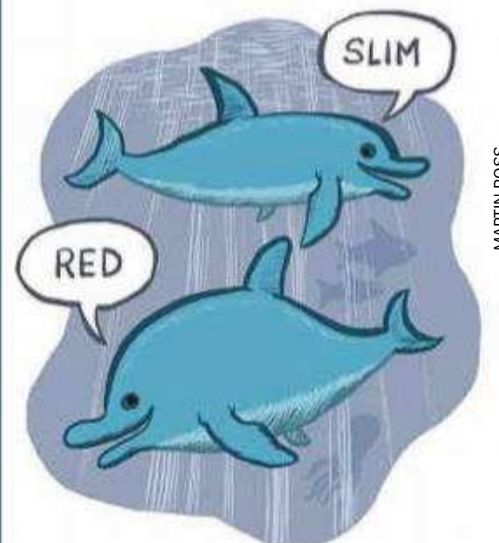
Trying to eliminate an unpleasant smell in his rented home, a Ferndale, Michigan, tenant used a smoke bomb to get rid of skunks that he believed were living in the crawlspace underneath. Unfortunately, the entire house caught fire and is now uninhabitable. No skunks were found. *D.Mirror*, 3 Mar 2018.

FIRESTARTERS 3

A Midgee, Queensland, man was left with severe burns, lacerations and shrapnel injuries after igniting a can and a half of insect spray whilst attempting to burn cockroaches in his kitchen. "Cans of pest spray have clear warnings about not using them near naked flames", a fire officer said, "and the instructions are put there for a reason." *Midgee Guardian*, 8 Mar 2018.

WHAT'S MY NAME?

Male dolphins call each other by "name", according to a study of 17 bottlenose dolphins at Shark Bay, Western Australia. Each was referred to by an individual vocal label, making the cetaceans the only animal aside from humans to give each other names. *Sun*, *Courier Mail (Queensland)*, 9 June 2018.



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

AUTO-EROTICISM

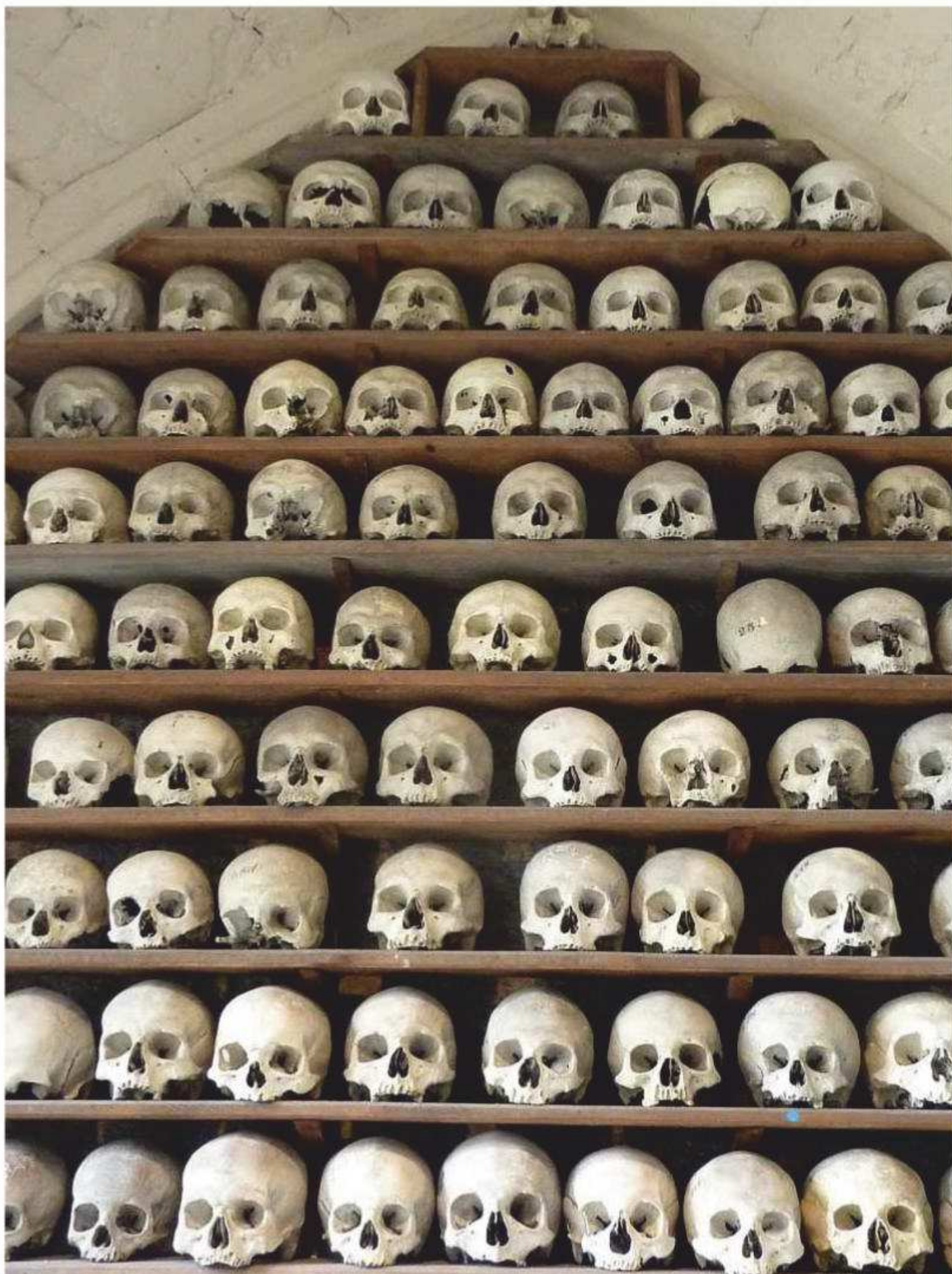
Police in Newton, Kansas, arrested a 24-year-old man found attempting to have sex with a car on 1 May. "A naked male [was found] underneath a car," said Lt. Scott Powell. "He was attempting to stick his penis into the tailpipe of the vehicle." He ignored the police and was subdued with a taser. He was hospitalised as the result of "his odd behaviour," due to a .35 blood alcohol level and possible drug use. *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 3 May 2018.

CROW TROUBLE

For the past three years, Brenda Brown's car has been vandalised by a pair of crows. Her windscreen wipers have been ripped off four times, and the destructive corvids peck at the wing mirrors. Ms Brown, 78, of Newark, Nottinghamshire, says the crows wake her up as early as 4am by pecking at her windows. "I don't know what they've got against me. Next door had the same colour car, but they never touched that and never banged on their windows". *BBC News*, 7 April 2018.

FELINE SNACK

A man returned to his house in Boulder, Colorado, around 10.30pm on 9 August to find a mountain lion in the living room. When it looked straight at him and licked its lips, he ran out and called police. His fellow tenant, Kayla Slaughter, believes it snuck in through a screen in an open window. They later found it had eaten Slaughter's pet cat, Klondike. Hours later, the mountain lion walked out the front door and back into the wild. *WIVB.com*, 13 Aug 2018.



SKULL-DUGGERY

On 15-16 July, thieves stole 21 skulls from an ossuary in the crypt of St Leonard's Church in Hythe, Kent. The ossuary, open to visitors during the summer months, is believed to hold the remains of people originally buried in the area's churchyards from the 12th to the 15th centuries, and is the largest and best-preserved collection of ancient human skulls and bones in Britain. A lock on the church door was found damaged. *BBC News*, *Metro*, 18 July; *D.Mail*, 20 July; *Church Times*, 3 Aug 2018.



MARTIN ROSS

PHOTOS: DAVID SUTTON



Maria's store helps her support her five children



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Khoeurm's farm will provide jobs for her local community



Raised: £640.00
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The search for Planet X

DAVID HAMBLING looks to the heavens as hopes grow for the discovery of a strange new world

Few astronomical discoveries are quite as exciting as a new planet in the Solar System. The Japanese Subaru telescope recently found a small object called The Goblin out beyond the orbit of Pluto, which points to the existence of another world waiting to be discovered.

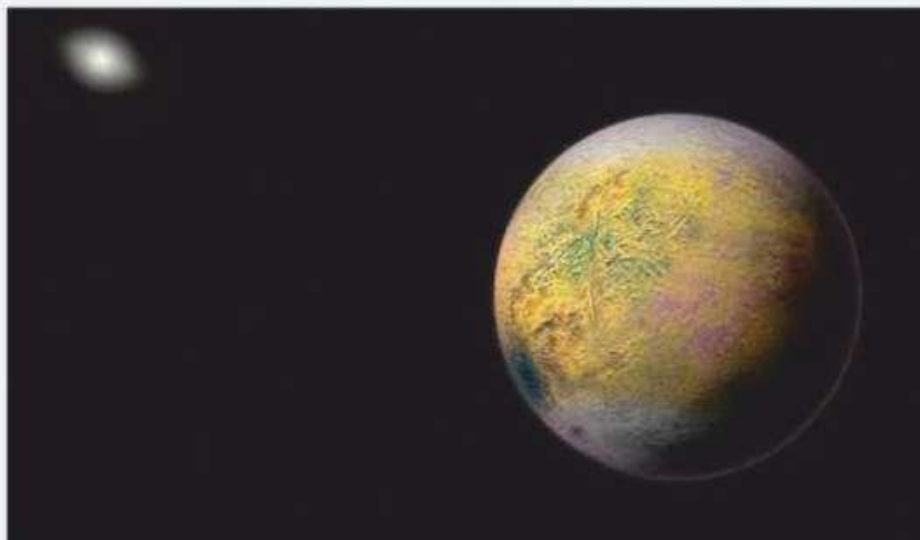
In classical times there were only five known planets besides the Earth: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, all of which can be easily distinguished with the naked eye. It was not until the invention of the telescope that more distant planets could be spotted. William Herschel identified Uranus in 1781, the first new planet to be found in the modern age, an epic discovery that shook the world.

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies / When a new planet swims into his ken," Keats wrote in 1816, showing the excitement still felt over Herschel's finding three decades later.

Observers noted an irregularity in the orbit of Uranus: it was being tugged by the gravitational pull of another, unseen planet. The hunt was on again. French mathematician Urbain Le Verrier calculated the likely position of the new planet, and Neptune was duly spotted by German astronomer Gottfried Galle in 1846.

This brought the tally to eight. Again, orbital irregularities in Neptune hinted at a further new world, referred to as Planet X. In 1930, 22-year-old Clyde Tombaugh was working at the Lowell Observatory, carrying out a systematic search of the zone where Planet X has been predicted. Tombaugh found a new world, but nothing like what was expected. Rather than being a gas giant like Neptune or Uranus, it was a small icy planet, just a fifth of the diameter of the Earth. Tombaugh's discovery was dubbed Pluto.

The real Planet X was still out there, but it must have an eccentric orbit like a comet. It would spend millennia out in the far reaches and only occasionally come close enough to affect the inner Solar System. This was enough to spark some wild pseudoscience from writers like Immanuel Velikovsky (see **FT118:40-45**) and Zachariah Sitchin (see **FT173:39-41, 271:24**), who claimed that biblical catastrophes were the result of close encounters with Planet X – called Nibiru in Sitchin's work – and that such events would happen again sometime



LEFT: Artists' impression of recently discovered body 'The Goblin'.

Telescope, may be powerful enough, but this will not be in place until 2021.

It might also be possible to detect Planet X in the microwave band using existing microwave telescopes, depending on its properties. An array in Chile called the Atacama Large Millimetre Array (ALMA) should be able to detect the microwave glow

soon. The Heaven's Gate cult, which committed mass suicide in 1997, believed that life on Earth was about to be destroyed by this type of cosmic event (**FT96:15, 100:35-41, 103:45, 104:57**).

Meanwhile, astronomers continued their search. In 2005, Californian astronomer Mike Brown discovered a new body, which was appropriately named Eris after the Greek goddess of discord, and which was initially hailed as a tenth planet. Eris was significantly more massive than Pluto but turned out to be only one of several small icy bodies in the distant Solar System. These are known as Trans-Neptunian Objects or TNOs. Eris was categorised as a dwarf planet rather than a true planet, and Pluto was also downgraded. Brown received a considerable amount of hate mail as a result, and wrote a book called *How I Killed Pluto and Why It Had It Coming*.

The new discovery had decreased the number of planets. The silver lining was that, as more TNOs were discovered, their positions provided more clues to a Planet X. If there were no massive objects at this distance, the TNOs should be spread out randomly. Instead, they are clumped together so they all stay on the same side of the Sun. This indicates that there is a large mass on the other side, which shepherds the TNOs into their observed orbits.

This pattern makes Planet X more probable than ever, but confirms that it must be at a vast distance. According to predictions, Planet X should be over 10 times the mass of the Earth, but at least six times as far from the Sun as distant Pluto. Even giant orbiting instruments like the Hubble Space Telescope, specifically designed to probe the far reaches of space, are not able to pick it up. Hubble's successor, the James Webb Space

Telescope, may be powerful enough, but this will not be in place until 2021. It might also be possible to detect Planet X in the microwave band using existing microwave telescopes, depending on its properties. An array in Chile called the Atacama Large Millimetre Array (ALMA) should be able to detect the microwave glow from a planet at the same sort of distance as Planet X, but the search is made difficult by the vast number of closer objects – a million or more asteroids and other bodies – which get in the way. Cataloguing and filtering these out of the picture is a huge undertaking.

The latest discovery, officially announced on 2 October, is a body called TG397 – but is more widely known by its nickname, 'The Goblin'. This appellation is supposedly because its discovery was in the same general time frame as Halloween – astronomers, who work with huge numbers, are prone to rough approximations.

The Goblin is about 300km (186 miles) across and has the widest orbit yet seen. It takes a staggering 40,000 years to go around the Sun. At its closest, it is more than twice as distant as Pluto, and at its furthest it is 60 times as far away. This means that for 99 per cent of the time it would be invisible even to the powerful Subaru telescope which spotted it. The Goblin's orbit also points towards the influence of an unseen Planet X.

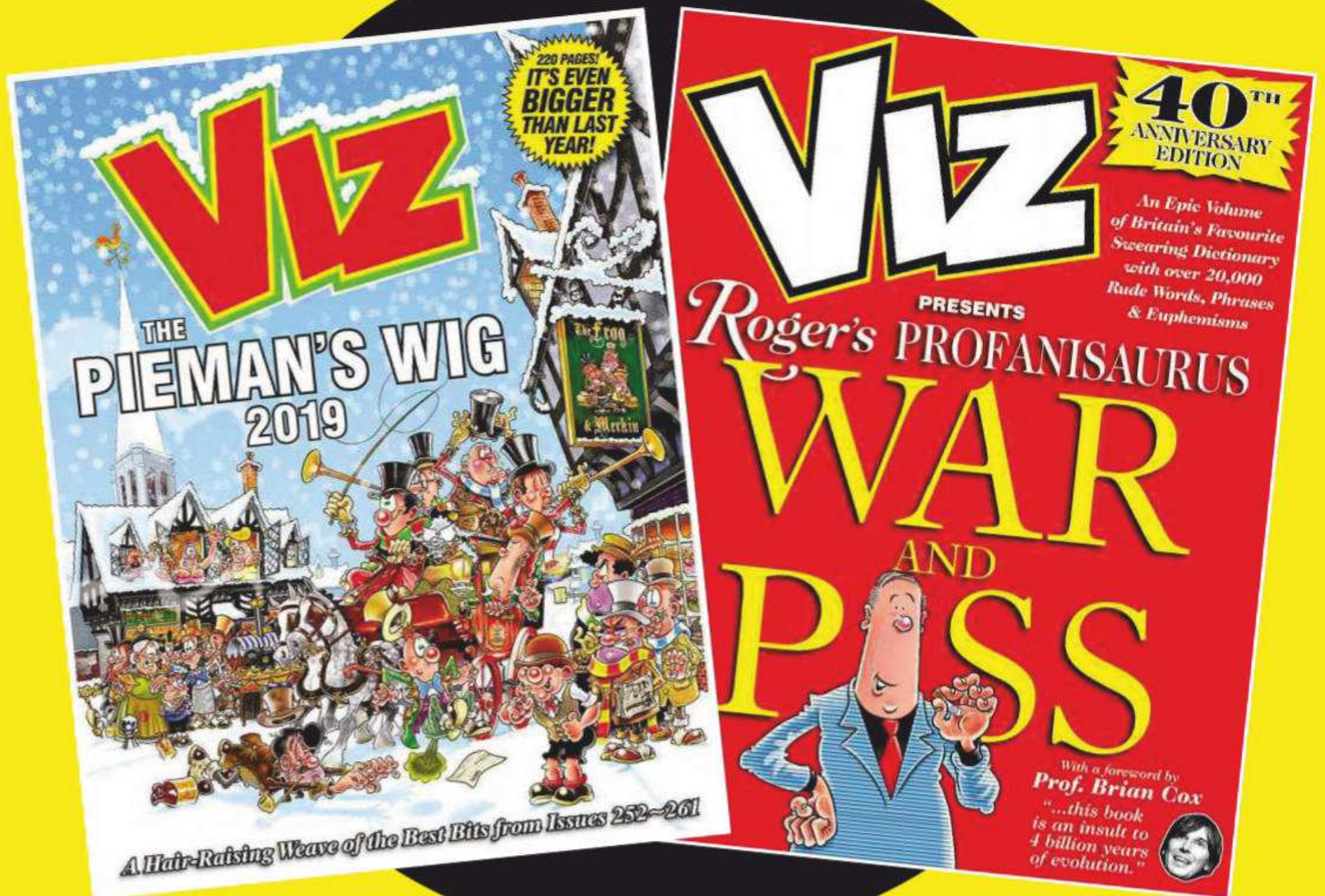
"We are nearing the 90 per cent likelihood of Planet X being real with this discovery," according to American astronomer Scott Sheppard.

Planet X is not quite a done deal. Astronomer Ann-Marie Madigan of Colorado University, who heads the wonderfully named Eccentric Dynamics team, has suggested that the orbital anomalies of TNOs could be produced by a cluster of small asteroids rather than a single body. Computer models indicate that this is an equally valid solution to the problem.

Planet X remains tantalisingly just out of astronomers' reach. It is even possible that it has already been spotted but misidentified as a comet or other body. There will be some interesting days ahead.



A DOUBLE WHAMMY 40TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL



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PAUL DEVEREUX, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind*, digs up the latest archaeological discoveries

RING-A-DING-DING

A set of elongated stones with rounded edges, making them similar in shape to “French baguettes” as someone put it, were discovered many years ago in the high desert near Colorado’s Great Sand Dunes National Park. Dated to about 5,000 years old, they were of slightly different sizes and had clearly been worked by human hand. Assumed to be tools used for grinding seeds or nuts, they were simply tucked away in a back room of the National Park’s museum.

Decades later, archaeologist Marilyn Martorano took another look at them. She felt they couldn’t have been grinding tools because they didn’t have the right sort of wear marks on them. So what could have been their purpose? During her search for an answer, someone handed Martorano a video of lithophones in a French museum – resonant pieces of rock shaped and used for making stone xylophones. This immediately rang a bell for the archaeologist, and she was quick to test her mystery stones. Hearing is believing – when tapped, the stones ring with clear tones. Their varying shapes caused the stones to issue different notes. Music from the past.

Such a discovery from a place like Colorado is unexpected, but is a new recruit to the relatively recent sub-discipline of archaeology called ‘archaeoacoustics’, which is opening up additional, sonic, ways of studying ancient sites and features. Old stones can still speak. *National Public Radio*, 16 Sept; after *Colorado Public Radio*, 29 Aug 2018.

ANCIENT CUTIE

Palaeontologists studying the remote antiquity of the Palaeolithic age usually have to make do with bones they are lucky enough to find, but in 2016 they got two rare treats from deep within the permafrost of western Canada’s Yukon Territory. In June, gold mining operations unearthed a mummified Caribou 80,000 years old (dated from the volcanic ash layer in which it was deposited); then, in July, an astonishingly well-preserved wolf pup radiocarbon-dated to at least 50,000 years ago (the limit for radiocarbon dating) was found nearby. Both ancient animals have their skin, muscle and hair intact – in fact, they are considered to be among the oldest mammal soft tissue yet recovered anywhere.

The wolf pup is especially remarkable and has just been put on display at the cultural centre of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation in Dawson City. “The wolf pup looks exactly like a taxidermied little puppy,” says Yukon palaeontologist Grant Zakula. “It’s got a little tail, hair, paws, eyelids and lips. It’s spectacular.” Elsa Panciroli, a palaeontologist at the University of Edinburgh, described the



TOP: Archaeologist Marilyn Martorano shows off some of the stones with help from her daughter Andrea, a percussionist. **ABOVE:** The preserved wolf pup found deep in the permafrost of Yukon Territory.

find as “exceptional – you just want to reach out and stroke it.” All in all, a real cutie. *Guardian*, 14 Sept; *Smithsonian*, 17 Sept; *Live Science*, 18 Sept 2018.

CHINESE PYRAMID

On the Loess Plateau in north-central China archaeologists have excavated a 4,300-year-old city that contains a stepped pyramid some 230ft (70m) high and covers 59 acres (24ha) at its base. It was decorated with eye symbols and hybrid part-human, part-animal faces. Atop the pyramid were extensive palaces built of rammed earth, with wooden pillars and roofing tiles, and a water reservoir.

The surrounding city itself spreads over an area of 988 acres (400ha), and flourished for several centuries. Pits containing decapitated human heads have been discovered within it as well as other sacrificial human remains, and, curiously, jade artefacts wedged between the blocks of all the city’s structures. The archaeologists have speculated that, taken together, these two factors may have imbued the whole city with ritual and religious potency. Today, its ruins are called “Shimao”, but its original name is of course unknown. *Live Science*, 23 Aug 2018, citing an original article in *Antiquity*, vol.92, no.364, 22 Aug 2018, pp. 1008-1022.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

230: PUSSY GALORE

(Obvious tribute to Honor Blackman)

Column jointly dedicated to Mat Coward, *FT*'s principal aelurophile, and – what else? – Mrs Slocombe's pussy.

No cats in Schlanger's lacunose Index to Fort. But our master was no aelurophobe, as were (allegedly – evidences are elusive) Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, and Hitler:

"There have been strange fostering: young rabbits adopted by cats..."

"There is a story of five hypnotized cats. A multitude alighted upon a lawn. Five cats sat around, motionless, gazing at the insects." – *Books*, pp689, 743.

Although not indigenous there – skeletal evidences dispersed from Cyprus to China put them much further back – Egypt was pussy heaven with its cat goddess Bastet (prefiguring the Cat-Women of Batman and *Clockwork Orange*) and her great temple wherein felines might be embalmed; cf. Otto Keller, *Zür Geschichte der Katz in Altertum*, in *Römische Mitteilungen* 23 (1908), 40-70, and Katharine Rogers, *The Cat and the Human Imagination: Feline Images from Bast to Garfield* (2001).

Herodotus (bk2 ch66) was struck by the priority Egyptians gave to saving them from house fires and the custom of shaving their eyebrows when the house moggy died. Such reverence is frequently mentioned, e.g. Cicero, *Tuscan Disputations* (bk5 ch86) and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (bk5 v530), down to Rufinus (*Ecclesiastical History*, bk6 ch23) Diodorus Siculus (bk1 ch83) says a Roman soldier who accidentally killed a cat was lynched by a maddened mob.

Such devotion could backfire. Polyænus (*Stratagems* 7. 9) says at the Battle of Pelusium (525 BC), Persian king Cambyses painted cats on his soldiers' shields to deter enemy arrows, and flung felines into their faces – Genghis Khan would attach brands to their tails as his trademark weapon. Herodotus (bk3 ch11 para3) omits this, but compensates with the information that Egyptian bonces were so hard as to remain undented by repeated stone-smashings.

In a fragment of comedian Anaxandrides, a Greek tells an Egyptian, "You weep when you see a cat in trouble; I'd gladly skin it alive!" Some thought a cat-skin stretched over infected areas would cure shingles – wish I'd known that in my bout of that blasted malady. Most



wondrous: Egyptian word for Cat is MAU – a purr-fect pedigree for Meow.

Many an editor of classical texts (e.g. Ferguson and Mayor on Juvenal, Palmer and Wilkins on Horace) assert cats were unknown in Greece and Rome. These blanket deniers would be amazed that Donald Engels got a 227-page book out of them, *Classical Cats, The Rise and Fall of the Sacred Cat* (1999) – title would have appealed to T S Eliot. All hinges on how you translate three classical nouns: *Aeluros* – common to both languages, still in modern Greek. *Feles* – obvious ancestor of 'feline'. *Galea* – Greek.

Aeluros is rare in extant Latin, only Aulus Gellius (bk20 ch8) and Juvenal (15. 7). The other two are common in their respective languages. Latecomers, equally uncommon, were *Cattus/Catta* (Latin) and *Kattos/Katta* (Greek, modernised to *Gata*); cf. Italian 'Gatta' and Spanish 'Gato'.

Editors and dictionaries often translate the earlier terms as 'Ferret' or 'Weasel'. However, no ferrets in Egyptian hieroglyphs or mummies, whilst in Greek folklore the weasel was an omen of death. Furthermore, Greek *Iktis* and Latin *Mustela* normally designate these creatures.

Catweazle, anybody?

Greeks and Romans were not ferret-legging Yorkshire colliers (see champion Reg Mellor on YouTube). Did they really prefer these vicious rodents to cuddly cats?

There's also Græco-Roman art and cognate evidence, surveyed with literary sources by F Lazenby, *Classical Journal* 44 (1949), 245-307, online), though many references are inaccurate.

Horace's Town-and-Country-Mouse fable (*Satires* 2.6) terminates the murine meeting with dogs, leading editor Arthur

Palmer to infer no cats in Rome. This finale may only suggest Horace didn't like them. Dogs are not great mousers – certainly was never a part of our Bouvier's job description.

Græco-Roman houses were mouse-plagued. Especially their libraries. Juvenal, Lucian, Quintilian all mention philistine rodents chewing up precious manuscripts.

More fearful depredations in Byzantium, where they nest in a glutton's beard (*Timarion* 18 – conspectus of references in my annotated 1983 translation, p107), a plague exemplified in Theodore Prodromos's 12th-century skit 'Battle of the Cats and Mice' – pussies are female, derived from Babrius (*Fables* 31 – creatures equally prominent for their cunning in Aesop and Phædrus – one plays dead to lure out the mice), partly parodying Aeschylus's *Persians*, deemed political satire by Byzantinist Herbert Hunger; cf. Ewald Kislinger, 'Byzantine Cats', online.

Can't compare, though, with the last Nizam of Hyderabad who lost three million pounds in banknotes to marauding nibblers. Not that you need shed tears for a fellow who had a diamond paperweight worth 50 million quid.

Gellius discusses ælurian eyes glittering in the dark. Theophrastus's Superstitious Man (*Characters* 16. 3) avoids them in the street, pelting three apotropaic stones; Theocritus (*Idyls* 15. 28) says they love lolling on luxurious beds – all these suggest cats more than ferrets and weasels.

Seneca (*Letter* 121) says cats were common in Roman houses. Did this extend to the royal palace? Three *Greek Anthology* epigrams (bk7 203-5) describe revenge killing of cat for eating a pet partridge. Shades of Humphrey mauling the baby robins at Number Ten with ensuing suspicions the Blairs did him in.

Final furry flurry. Palladius (*Agriculture*, bk4 ch9 para4) says cats had a very specialised job: killing moles in artichoke beds. Aelian (*Animals*, bk6 ch27) knew male tabbies whose spunk was hot enough to ignite partners' pussies. If I've overheated you, try Pliny's fever-reducing recommendation (*Natural History*, bk28 ch66 para229) of salted liver of cat killed under waning Moon.

What's New Pussycat? – question from a Cat-erwauling Tom (Jones).

SPECIAL REPORT

THE CROYDON CAT KILLER

As the Metropolitan Police wind up their three-year investigation by concluding that the merciless moggy-murderer is nothing but a product of cat lovers' fearful imaginations, **PAUL SIEVEKING** surveys the crime scene.



ABOVE: Tony Jenkins and Boudicca Rising, co-founders of SNARL, maintain that many cats are the victims of a human killer.

In September the police announced that the “Croydon cat killer” [FT341:4], aka the “M25 cat killer” – blamed for murdering around 500 cats over four years, initially leaving the mutilated remains near the homes of stricken owners in the south London suburb of Croydon – was a figment of the imagination [FT372:2]. Concluding Operation Takahe, their long-running investigation launched in November 2015 and costing half a million pounds, the police asserted that the majority of feline victims were hit by cars before having their heads and tails removed by scavenging foxes. They announced that there was no evidence of human involvement, after a leading veterinarian reviewed six autopsies. However, Neenie Sadler, whose cat was killed, said: “This is all because the Met don’t want to put any more

funding into this investigation.”

Dr Henny Martineau, head of veterinary forensic pathology at the Royal Veterinary College, had previously said the animals had died of “suspicious” blunt force trauma, but she has now revised these claims after finding fox DNA on five of the corpses, and previously undiscovered puncture wounds. Three separate instances of CCTV footage showed foxes carrying bodies or body parts of cats – in one case a cat’s head being carried into a school playground.

The legend of the Croydon bogeyman (named “Jack the Rippurr” by one Facebook group) spread internationally, as police and others warned that ‘he’ could be practising to kill humans. Serial killers with a predilection for animal torture include Albert DeSalvo (the ‘Boston Strangler’), David Berkowitz (the ‘Son of Sam’),

“The mutilated corpse is left on display in a specific position”

Mary Bell, Ian Brady, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, Fred West and Dennis Nilsen.

Boudicca Rising (47), co-founder with Tony Jenkins (52) of SNARL (South Norwood Animal Rescue and Liberty), still insists humans are responsible for the moggie massacre. “We have expert evidence to back this up,” she said. “We know cats are killed in traffic accidents and that foxes scavenge the bodies. We’ve seen that plenty of times before and we’ve discounted more than 1,500 incidents as being non-human related.”

Three veterinary practices in the South-East came out in support of SNARL’s theory about human involvement. Streatham Hill Vets in south London put a Facebook post up saying the police were “incorrect” in their findings, adding: “We have had several of these bodies brought in to us. They all consisted of clean, surgical type amputations or beheadings. They were NOT done by foxes or wild animals.”

In August, SNARL had handed police a list of nine suspects, all living in the London area. “Over the years we have had 50 people on the list,” said Ms Rising, “but we have now ruled a lot of them out.” Ms Rising was originally from South Africa; her father and former partner were both detectives. It was SNARL’s petition with more than 40,000 signatures that initially led to the official investigation in November 2015. “We are starting to get reports going back to 2013,” said Mr Jenkins (a former policeman). In January 2017 he said: “Two foxes were found beheaded and with injuries that exactly match the cats; one in Croydon, another in Bromley.” A specific mark – never revealed publically – left by the killer on dead animals is supposed to have linked suspicious cases... or so says Tom Foot in the *Camden New Journal*.

According to the *Sunday Express* (17 Dec 2017), “The Croydon Cat Killer... generally strikes in the middle of the night, often entering people’s gardens while they are asleep and lures cats towards him with food before bludgeoning them to death. Sickeningly, he stays by the bodies until they are cold, so that when he mutilates them there is no excess blood.” The *Sun* (4 Dec 2017) added



further details: “The killer has regularly struck twice in one night... Once clear of houses and CCTV cameras, he bludgeons the cat to death with a blunt tool before ‘precisely and surgically’ cutting off its head and removing its tail with a sharp knife. If he has time, he removes its organs and pelvis. The mutilated corpse is then left on display in a specific signature position for its owner to find... the cat killer was likely to have been violently or sexually abused as a child, and is probably known to authorities... the cat killer has been seen from a distance during sprees in Orpington, Kent, and Caterham, Surrey. He is described as a white male in his forties, [between 5ft 8in and 5ft 11in], with short brown hair and a pock-marked face who was dressed in dark clothing and carrying a rucksack, torch or headlamp.” He was said to make “kissing” noises while luring cats with food or toys. Criminologist Dr Adam Lynes said the killer was a low-paid worker who resents “idyllic suburban life”. He highlighted a similar massacre in 1730s Paris, by apprentices who resented their masters’ spoiled pets.

Already by the first half of 2016, the mutilated remains of cats (and sometimes foxes and rabbits) had been found across London – in Richmond, Streatham, Tottenham Hale, Ruislip, Coulsdon, Mottingham, Thornton Heath and beyond. SNARL logged mutilated cat reports from Frimley in Surrey, Farnborough in Hampshire, Luton in Bedfordshire, Orpington and Swanley in Kent, Bracknell in Berkshire, Brackley in Northamptonshire, as well as in Brighton and Birmingham. And in recent months, feline cadavres have been found in Sheffield and Manchester, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight, and Dover. Might copycats have been at work? Has there been a spike in such attacks, or is it all a matter of perception?

Samantha Glass, a Londoner



TOP: The Metropolitan Police have ended their three-year investigation.
ABOVE: Urban foxes, which mutilate roadkill, have been named as the culprits.

whose daughter’s cat Harley was killed last April, said the police verdict blaming foxes was “unbelievable”, adding: “Words fail me. There is countless evidence from the Met saying cats have been mutilated by a clean slice. There have been decapitated heads lying across London.” However, many experts agreed with the police verdict, among them John Bryant, an expert in humane fox deterrence who has worked in the London area for more than 20 years. (See his article on urban fox-dumping legends, **FT73:35-37**). “I’ve been in hundreds of gardens helping people deter foxes and I’ve found cats’ heads in gardens, tails and bits of legs,” he said. “They scavenge a dead cat from the road or even a dead fox, break it up and the

cubs play with it.” The urban fox population in London has doubled over the past 30 years, thanks to an increase in people feeding wildlife, with foxes also eating bird food and food left out for hedgehogs or badgers.

● The data on recent cat killings are in fact very various. In February 2016, the disappearance of a dozen pet cats in the Tonedale area of Wellington in Somerset was blamed on a panther-like big cat. Wildlife expert and local resident Alex Bowler had seen a spike in ABC sightings in the surrounding countryside, such as a railway track around Westford.

● In June 2016, six cats died of suspected antifreeze poisoning in Macclesfield, followed by two more in Orford, Cheshire. Within one week in

October, 10 cats went missing from a single road in Kidsgrove, Staffordshire. Only one turned up; it had to be put down after being found in woodland two miles away, poisoned and with broken ribs. A cat that had gone missing from Harrogate, North Yorkshire, in February 2016 was found dead in a local park the following November, with its tail and ear severed.

● In March and April 2017, four cats living in Layton Road, Gosport, Hampshire, were found poisoned, and others mutilated in Southsea, Hampshire, and Redhill, Surrey. A cat was found decapitated in a garden in St Albans on 16 May. In July police investigated eight suspected cat poisonings in Cilgerran, Pembrokeshire, in one week alone. The supposed ‘felcidal maniac’ was blamed for the death of up to 20 cats in the village. The hoof and decapitated head of a wild deer were found in Warlingham, Surrey, on 16 July. SNARL said the attack bore the same “sick hallmarks” as the Croydon cat killings.

● That same month came a report that 18 cats in the village of Beacon, near Camborne, Cornwall, had been poisoned with anti-freeze over the previous three years. In one week in October, five cats were poisoned with antifreeze on an estate in Wigan, Greater Manchester, around the same time the decapitated head of a fox was found in a playground in Wallington, Surrey. In August and September, seven black cats disappeared from the neighbouring villages of Crofton-on-Tees and Dalton-on-Tees in North Yorkshire. All were micro-chipped and none had been found dead on the roads. Some suspected they had been taken for use in witchcraft. In November, two pet rabbits were found mutilated in Hertfordshire.

● In December 2017, pet lovers in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales, were terrified that a gang was roaming the area killing their cats to “protect” native

SPECIAL REPORT



TOP: Ukiyo was reported as one of the first victims of the Cat Killer when her body was found deposited on a neighbour's doorstep in September 2015. **BELOW:** Clyde, an apparent victim of "Jack the Clipper", recovers from his shaving ordeal.



wildlife. At least 65 cats had been killed and countless others had disappeared, been maimed, or discovered hanging in their owners' front yards.

● Meanwhile in England on 8 December, a 31-year-old man, believed to be an East European truck driver, was detained in Duston, Northampton, after the discovery of five dead cats in the area between August and November, along with a number of arson attacks. The five cats had all been dismembered in a similar way. One, a cat called Rusty, was left in a plastic bag on the owner's doorstep on 28

August, and was discovered by the family's 14-year-old daughter. One or possibly more of the other corpses were also found in plastic bags, so foxes can be ruled out. The suspect's DNA matched a sample from one of the mutilated cats. The deaths of other animals, including rabbits, foxes, deer and even a squirrel were also linked to the case, and all linked to the busy "M25 cat killer". Boudicca Rising was sceptical of a connection with the Northampton killings, as there had been cat mutilation discoveries in the London area

By 25 March the hunt was on for "Jack the Clipper"

on 7, 8, and 9 December, two on Christmas Day (in Carshalton and Wallington), and another on 7 January 2018.

● On 13 March 2018, two cats were discovered outside Truro Cathedral in Cornwall, skinned, decapitated and limbless. A 24-year-old man was arrested and released pending further inquiries. In September 2018, Lisa Walker found her 13-year-old tabby Tiger-Lily in her garage in Bristol, choked to death with a cable tie.

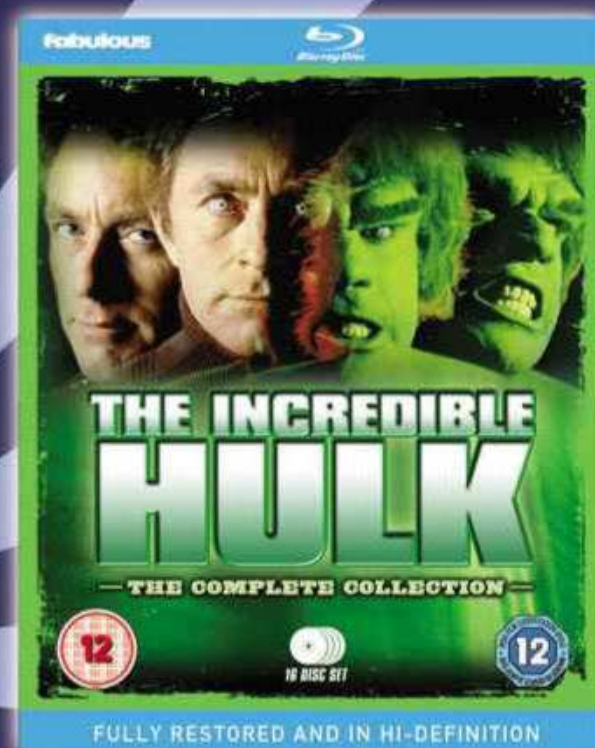
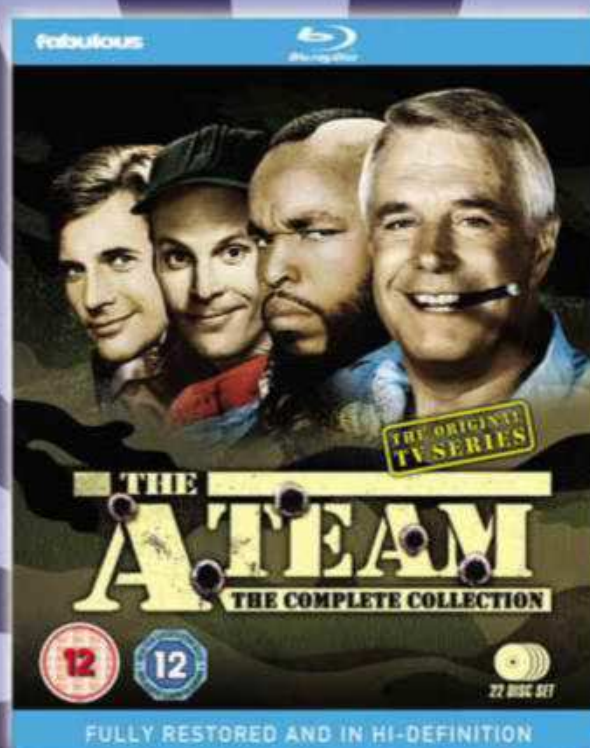
● Then there's cat-shaving. In June 2014, there were reports that someone was snatching domestic cats from around Southport, Merseyside, and shaving off their fur with an electric razor (**FT319:8**). On 7 March 2018, a six-year-old tabby called Clyde returned to its

owner in Bourne, Lincolnshire, with its belly shaved. By 25 March the hunt was on for "Jack the Clipper" after more than a dozen pets within six miles (10km) of each other in the Cotswolds had been left with patches of fur missing. The same thing had happened two years earlier with a similar number of cats. No arrests were made.

The name Operation Takahe for the Croydon cat killer investigation was reportedly chosen at random. Takahe happens to be the name of a near-extinct, flightless bird in New Zealand. The day after I compiled this gruesome survey of feline mutilation, a packet of clippings arrived from our correspondent Len Watson in Queensland. This included some yellowing pages from *Wild Life*, *Australian Nature Magazine*, dated February 1949, with a two-page feature on the Takahe (*Notornis hochstetteri*) entitled "Extinct Bird Re-discovered". Make of that what you will.

D.Mirror, 14 June 2014; *Western Daily Press*, 12 Feb; *D.Mail*, 26 April; *Times*, 4 June, 15 Oct; *Sun*, 6 Aug; *BBC News*, 9 Nov 2016; *<i>14 Jan*; *The News (Portsmouth)*, 8+11+12 April, 2 Sept; *D.Mirror*, 18 April, 21 July, 1 Sept, 28 Oct, 16 Dec; *D.Telegraph*, 20 April, 4 Oct; *Herts Advertiser*, 25 May, 9+16 Nov; *Metro*, 30 Aug; *Guardian*, 1+30 Sept; *BBC News*, 16 Sept, 27 Oct; *Times*, 4 Oct; *Sunday Sun*, 22 Oct; *Sun*, 8 Nov, 31 Dec; (*Sydney*) *Sunday Telegraph*, 18 Dec 2017; *Times*, 8 Jan; *D.Telegraph*, 17 Mar, 21 Sept; *Sun*, 8 Jan, 17 Mar, 21 Sept; *Sunday Mirror*, 18+25 Mar; *D.Mail*, 8 Jan, 5 May, 27 Aug, 21+29 Sept; *Lincolnshire Echo*, 15 Mar; *Sunday People*, 25 Mar; *NY Times*, 18 Sept; *D.Star*, 21 Sept; *Metro*, 20 Sept; *Guardian*, 22 Sept; *Sunday Express*, 23 Sept; *Camden New Journal*, 27 Sept 2018. For some interesting material on previous cat flaps as moral panics, see: <https://magoniamagazine.blogspot.com/2013/11/catflaps.html> + <https://magoniamagazine.blogspot.com/2013/12/more-catflaps.html>.

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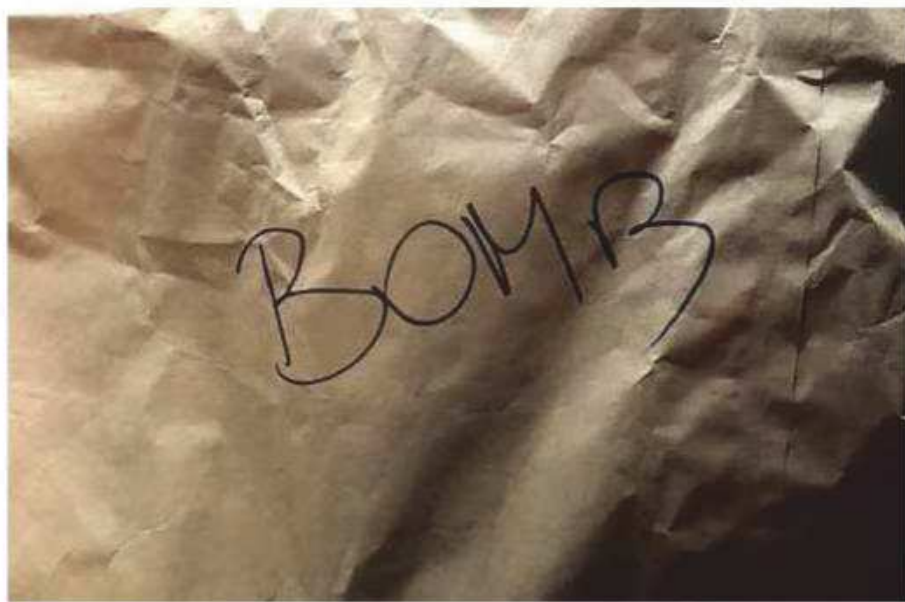
Sinister nursery rhymes in the middle of the night, the suicide pact that wasn't, loaf of terror, and the daring rescue of a large inflatable swan



SINISTER SINGING

For several months, a woman living in Bramford Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, with her two young children was woken almost every night by a tinny, distant rendition of a nursery rhyme, "It's Raining, It's Pouring". The spooky undertone of the song left her feeling sick and questioning whether she was imagining things. "It was waking me up in the night, it was absolutely terrifying," she said. "It was like something out of a horror movie... I heard it at all times of the night – 1am, 2am, 4am – it was sporadic, sometimes it would play once, other times it was over and over. Last week it played for hours."

On 10 September around 11.15pm she was once again awoken by the eerie song, repeating every two or three minutes. She quickly called Ipswich Borough Council's rapid response team, reporting that the sound was coming from the direction of Europa Way. A council officer joined the woman at the scene and tracked the music down to industrial premises on the neighbouring Farthing Road estate (business park), about 200 yards away, where the music was playing through a loudspeaker. It was actually designed to act as a deterrent to trespassers and was activated by motion sensors. A spokesman from the site said: "The sound is only supposed to act as a deterrent for opportunistic thieves that come onto our property, and it's designed only to be heard



by people on our private land. We are now aware of the problem – the motion sensors were being triggered by spiders crawling across the lenses of our [CCTV] cameras and it looks like we've had it turned up too loudly. We've adjusted it so this shouldn't happen again." The following day, the woman stood by her window as they tested a lower alarm volume, and couldn't hear it. "It's a massive relief and I'm looking forward to getting some actual sleep from now on," she said. *Ipswich Star*, *BBC News*, 12 Sept; *Sun*, 14 Sept 2018.

MORE MISPERCEPTIONS

- A passer-by thought a group of heavy metal fans out camping on 8 April were involved in a suicide pact and called the authorities. Emergency services mounted a full-scale rescue operation, including fire engines, ambulances and lifeboats. Three men were enjoying beers around a campfire on an island in Loch

Leven, Perthshire, as their children slept in a tent, when they saw the lights from police boats rushing across the water towards them. "It was like something out of *The X-Files*," said Panagiotis Filis, a lecturer at Aberdeen University and a founder of the Black Metal Brewery. "The police really did a great job of rescuing us – the only issue is that we didn't need rescuing." Police had smashed the windows of a car belonging to Ross Anderson, a civil engineer and one of the group, which was parked on the mainland, apparently searching for a suicide note. When interviewing the men, they said they had been concerned about a potential kidnapping.

The group was ferried across to dry land, where they reported seeing more than 20 emergency service vehicles and about 50 people waiting for them. David Henderson, a modern languages teacher and member of the heavy metal band Nyctopia, said he thought the incident



ABOVE LEFT: The Farthing Road industrial estate, source of the spooky nursery rhyme. ABOVE RIGHT: Hornsea Inshore Rescue with the inflatable swan. LEFT: The Bombetta "Bomb".

had happened because the group was dressed in black and the children had face paint on. The men – plus two 10-year-olds, a seven-year-old and a dog called Jazz – were left on the shore with nothing but a police incident number. They were forced to sleep in their cars because they were over the legal alcohol limit to drive home. *theguardian.com*, 10 April 2018.

- A passer-by dialled 999 when he saw a brown paper bag left outside an Italian restaurant in Wanstead, east London, with "Bomb" scrawled in marker pen on the top. Six police officers rushed to the scene to discover it was simply a bread delivery marked with a shortened reference to the name of the eatery, Bombetta (an Italian parcel of meat). Jose Alonso, manager of the restaurant, said the bread is left outside most mornings. The Gang of Fort enjoys the notion that a terrorist would helpfully label his bomb in this way. *D.Mail*, 13 June 2018.

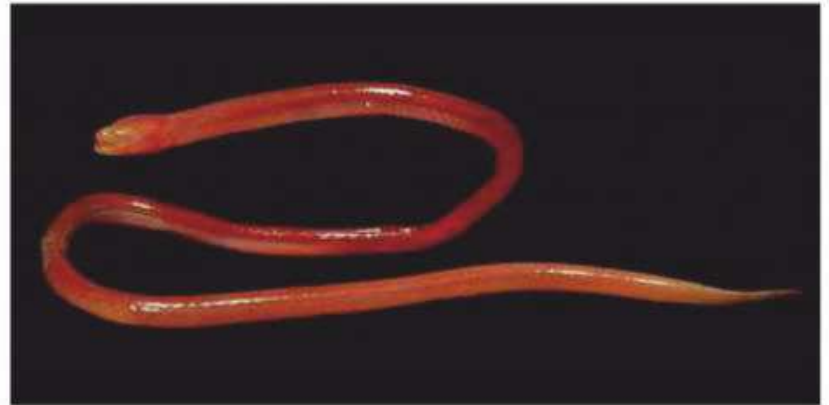
- Following reports of a windsurfer in difficulty, Hornsea Inshore Rescue were scrambled to a large white object in the water off the shore near Skipsea on the east Yorkshire coast. As they approached the scene, they found that the empty vessel was a large inflatable swan. *D.Telegraph*, 3 Sept 2018.



KARL SHUKER on a surprising new swamp eel far from water plus a monstrous artistic hoax

A SOIL-BURROWING BLIND EEL

Fish live in water... usually. Blatantly defying this traditional zoological tenet is a newly described species of swamp eel from India. Its discoverers were a team of researchers from London's Natural History Museum led by Dr Rachunliu G Kamei. They had been digging through damp soil seeking caecilians – limbless, superficially worm-like soil-dwelling amphibians – in northeastern India's Khasi Hills when they excavated a truly extraordinary and very unexpected animal. Long, pink, vermiform, and blind, when examined it proved to be neither a caecilian nor a worm, but rather a fish, specifically a species of synbranchid or swamp eel, and had been found at least 150ft (46m) away from the nearest stream (synbranchids typically live in freshwater). Moreover, it did not resemble any synbranchid that had previously been documented, with further examination confirming that its species was indeed new to science. It was duly designated the type specimen of this now recently described species, which has been officially dubbed *Monopterus rongsaw*, but



since no additional examples have been uncovered so far, it is also the only specimen of this new species procured. Living a totally subterranean existence, as an adult it has neither eyes nor fins nor body pigmentation, but is bright reddish-pink on account of its skin's extensive vascularisation, which facilitates direct absorption of oxygen through its skin, as its gills are vestigial. www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2018/september/new-species-of-blind-eel-that-burrows-through-the-soil-discovered.html

SEA MONSTER ON SHOW

Six issues ago, I documented a small but mystifying sea monster carcass with a split-open gut that had supposedly been discovered washed up on a beach on Wolf Island in Georgia, USA, during March 2018 [FT367:23]. It somewhat resembled the alleged appearance of a local water monster named the Altamaha as described by eyewitnesses, but it was subsequently deemed by a number of authorities to be most likely a hoax, a model probably combining a shark's tail with a wire-framed papier-mâché body, plus some real pink fish guts. And sure enough, this is almost precisely what it has turned out to be.

In September 2018, New York artist and self-identified myth-maker Zardulu revealed on Twitter that she had created it, by adding papier-mâché components to a taxiderm shark specimen, and that she had then ordered it to be left on the beach for someone to find. The rest, as they say, is (cryptozoological) history. She stated that the model, which she had formally dubbed 'Ketos Troias', is actually a re-creation of an ancient Greek myth featuring a sea monster named Ketos, which was sliced open by

hero Heracles using a fishhook. What is more, in October 2018 Zardulu's Ketos was actually placed on public display, featuring in her first solo exhibition alongside several other examples of her work. Entitled *Triconis Aeternis: Rites and Mysteries*, the exhibition was staged at TRANSFER's gallery on Canal Street in Manhattan, New York. www.vice.com/en_us/article/59apnx/this-washed-up-sea-creature-was-the-work-of-viral-hoaxer-zardulu; <http://transferyallery.com/zardulu-the-mythmaker-triconis-aeternis/>.

HONDURAS HAIRY HORROR

Some of the most intriguing cryptozoological reports are so short that they can be easily overlooked. So it (nearly) was with the following recent example, which I have not previously seen referred to in any crypto-linked publication. The report appeared in a May 2018 *New Yorker* article by Douglas Preston. For the most part, this was devoted to an archaeological expedition to La Mosquitia, a remote mountainous wilderness in eastern Honduras, Central America, in which he had participated during 2015, seeking a lost city known as the City of the Monkey God.

During the expedition, which did indeed uncover a hitherto-undocumented ancient city's remains hidden in a previously unexplored, densely forested valley, the team also encountered many animals, including monkeys and an abundance of wild cat species, all of which seemed entirely unafraid of them due to the 'lost world' nature of this far-flung locality. Moreover, it also harbours at least one notable mystery beast that may be still undescribed by science. In his article, Preston mentioned almost in passing that after Conservation International had left a series of camera traps in the valley in order to film its wildlife, Honduras biologist Manfredo Turcios Casco returned in September 2017 to retrieve them, and made a very interesting, unexpected sighting there.

While collecting the camera traps, he and the Honduran Special Forces soldier with him, a Miskito Indian from the region, spied a most unusual animal that neither had seen before. It "had the head of a giant rodent," Turcios recalled, "with a hairy tail" and was about two and a half feet (76cm) long. With the help of an artist, Turcios worked up a drawing of the mysterious creature immediately after his return. Whether the animal is a mammal unknown to science (something almost unheard of), a variant or mutant, or a species outside its normal range, are all open questions. As yet, this mystifying mammal's identity remains undetermined, but no longer undocumented, by science. <https://www.newyorker.com/science/elements/deep-in-the-honduran-rain-forest-an-ecological-swat-team-explores-a-lost-world>, 21 May 2018.





MEDICAL BAG

Prodigiously clever kids, stunningly hirsute babies, a rare case of twins born from a double womb, and the perils of straining on the loo...



ABOVE LEFT: The 12-week scan picture showing Jennifer Ashwood's two wombs. ABOVE RIGHT: Three-year-old Ophelia Morgan-Dew, Britain's youngest member of MENSA.

PREGNANT IN BOTH WOMBS

Last December, Jennifer Ashwood, 31, from Camborne, Cornwall, learned she was having twins, but it was only in February that a 20-week scan revealed she had a "heart-shaped" uterus comprising two wombs, with one baby in each. The odds of such an occurrence are said to be 500 million to one, with fewer than 100 examples ever recorded worldwide. Most pregnant women with Mrs Ashwood's condition, known as bicornuate uterus, carry one baby on one side; indeed, Mrs Ashwood had daughter Millie, now eight, without finding out about her unusual anatomy. This time she went into labour at 34 weeks and gave birth to son Piran, 5lb 10oz (2.6kg), and daughter Poppy, 5lb 3oz (2.4kg), via caesarean section. *D.Mail*, 31 July 2018.

'LOST' LENS FOUND

A woman has had a contact lens removed from her eyelid 28 years after it was thought to have fallen out. Medics at Ninewells hospital in Dundee carried out an MRI scan after the patient, now aged 42, complained of swelling over her left eye. Images revealed an ovoid-shaped cyst about 8mm long, but there was no evidence of anything inside it. When surgeons removed the lump, the cyst ruptured revealing an extremely fragile RGP (Rigid

Gas Permeable) contact lens. The woman's mother recalled that she had been struck in the eye by a shuttlecock while playing badminton when she was 14, and it had been assumed the lens had been knocked out by the impact. The report in the *British Medical Journal* stated: "Spontaneous migration of a hard contact lens into the eyelid is a relatively known occurrence, but we were only able to find four reported cases of lens migration secondary to significant trauma. This case report exhibits the longest time between traumatic RGP lens migration into the eyelid and presentation of eyelid swelling. The patient never wore RGP lenses following this incident." According to Dr Sirjhan Patel, though the woman had had a slightly droopy eyelid following the accident, it was a mystery why the contact lens only caused swelling and inflammation after nearly three decades. *BMJ Case Reports*, 10 Aug; *livescience.com*, 14 Aug; *BBC News*, 17 Aug; *D.Mail*, 18 Aug 2018.

TAKING THE STRAIN

"Defecation syncope is the official term for fainting during a bowel movement and accounts for approximately one per cent of all emergency room visits," said a spokesperson for the University of Calgary medical centre. "Fainting on the toilet may

happen if a person is constipated, because they have the urge to take a deep breath, then push and strain. But straining lowers the volume of blood returning to the heart, and the vasovagal reflex in the neck causes the heart rate to decrease in people who are dehydrated or have low blood pressure. So we tell people, 'don't push so hard next time'." Dr Chris Simpson of Queen's University added that "although it's scary to pass out while on the toilet, overstraining is the most common reason for fainting, rather than underlying heart disease. Indeed, I have never uncovered a potentially life-threatening condition in someone who complained of defecation syncope. If people feel sweaty or clammy, they should lie down to avoid injury and full-blown fainting. We also advise drinking plenty of water, and adding a little salt to the diet." *Canadian Press*, 20 April 2018.

CHILD PRODIGIES

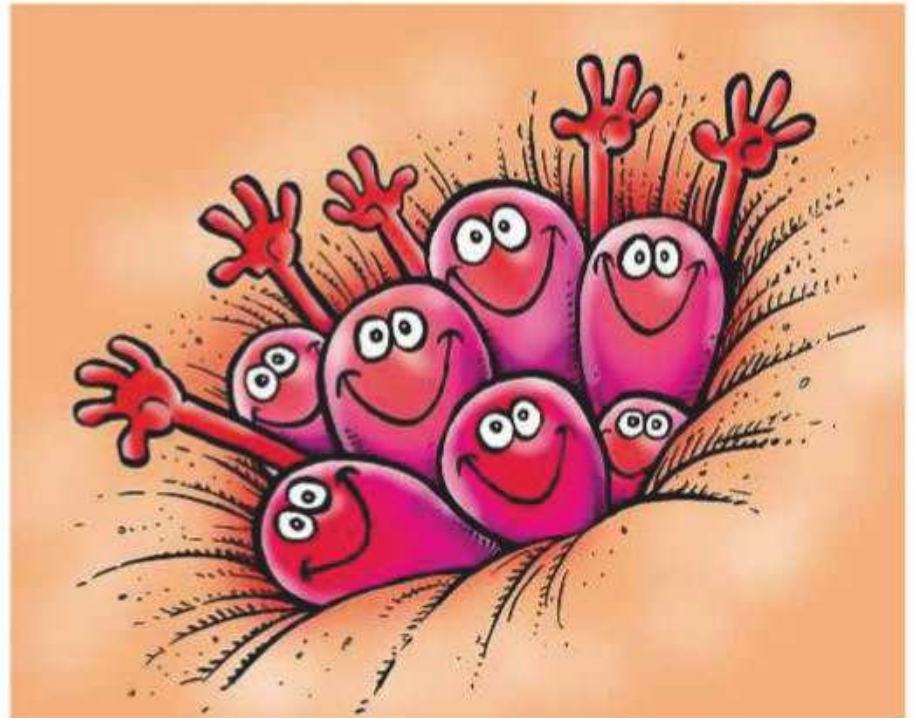
• Sara Marshall, 29, from Newcastle, reckons she has the world's youngest talking baby, after her son Tommy-Frank uttered his first words at nine weeks. When she said "hiya" and "love you" he repeated her words back. "At first I thought I was going mad," she said, "but he said it a few times. We caught it on video – it's as plain as day." The

boy was born in mid-April and by mid June his gurgling started to sound like words. Most babies begin to talk at about 18 months, saying simple words. *Sun*, 21 July 2018.

• Ophelia Morgan-Dew, of Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire, spoke her first word at eight months – it was "Hiya", just like Tommy-Frank. Now aged three, she has been given an IQ score of 171, putting her in the top 0.03 per cent of the population, 11 points above the IQ of Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking, and nine points above Arnav Sharma, 11, from Reading, and Rahul Doshi, 12, from Barnet, who had previously been labelled Britain's cleverest children. Ophelia is now Britain's youngest member of Mensa. She quickly learned number, colours and the alphabet, and can remember things that happened before she was a year old. *D.Mail*, *D.Mirror*, 9 Aug 2018.

• Amanda Do arrived from Vietnam aged 12 in 2016, joining a comprehensive school in Year 8. She moved to Francis Holland independent school and was fast-tracked to Year 11 with a full scholarship. While taking an undergraduate module in physics and writing four novels, she tackled her GCSEs in just nine months, with a clean

230: PILING IT ON



HUNT EMERSON

The myth

Hæmorrhoids are a pain in the bum. That is to say, hemorrhoids (in the USA) or emerods (in the Bible) are a medical condition, belonging to that particular sub-group (along with gout and the DTs) of disorders which are funny only to those who've yet to experience them.

The "truth"

Hæmorrhoids aren't an illness – they're a standard part of the human anatomy. We are all born with them. Everyone has hæmorrhoids, all the time. You'd be sorry if you didn't have them, because they help to control bowel movements. They are cushions full of blood vessels – which, for instance, prevent your anus from flapping open every time you cough. So, clearly, hooray for hæmorrhoids. Unfortunately, they are prone, in a large proportion of the population, and especially in the over-50s, to become chronically inflamed, leading to pain, itching and bleeding. This can be caused by various bad habits such as sitting too much, lifting heavy things without due care, and, of course, straining at ye stoole. Doctors tend to refer to swollen hæmorrhoids as piles, while laymen often use the words interchangeably. Thus it's perhaps reasonable to say that everyone has hæmorrhoids, but not everyone has piles.

Sources

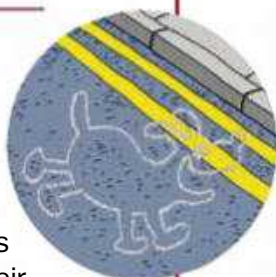
www.livescience.com/40316-americans-interest-hemorrhoids.html; <https://gizmodo.com/everyone-has-hemorrhoids-yes-even-you-1563334066>; www.womenshealthmag.co.uk/health/symptom-checker/6810/11-things-all-women-need-to-know-about-haemorrhoids/

Disclaimer

If you make your living inserting your finger in sunless regions, and you can correct any of our errors, please pile in.

Update

In **FT357:21** we wondered about chalk outlines at crime scenes. Reminiscences this year of the Jeremy Thorpe murder trial revealed an interesting detail of their place in the popular imagination. When Norman Scott's dog was shot dead in 1975, in Porlock, Somerset, the first reporters on the scene found nothing photographable to illustrate their story. To remedy this, they drew a chalk outline of a large dog on the road, and that photo, on the front page of the regional press, began a story that eventually made global headlines. (Source: *Western Daily Press*, 2 June 2018).



sweep of A*s and 9s. She also sang in the school's chamber choir, designed robots, won a national maths championship and performed her own music on piano in the school talent show. "I'm looking forward to studying maths, further maths, biology and chemistry at A-level and going to university to study biochemistry," said Amanda (now 14). "There are so many medical issues I would like to research. I am also constructing a new language." *D.Telegraph*, 24 Aug 2018.

WORLD'S HAIRIEST BABY?

Chanco, a six-month-old girl from Japan, was born with a stunning mop of hair last December and since last May has become an online sensation with more than 72,000 fans on Instagram. Video posted online on 23 July shows her hair being cut and styled at an age when many babies barely have any at all. The news report asserted that she could be the world's hairiest baby. Other hairy babies currently in the news include Katherine Mary Matthews, aged six months, from Wordsley in the West Midlands, who hair was 8in (20cm) long in early August; and Rosie Darby from Audenshaw, Manchester, who had a full head of hair at three months. "She had nearly the same amount when born," said her mother, Lauren Schofield, 26. *msn.com*, *D.Mirror*, 23 July; *Halesowen Chronicle*, 2 Aug; *Sun on Sunday*, 10 Sept 2018. 2018. For

other hairy babies, see **FT348:18**, **356:23**.

TOOTH OUT AT 12 DAYS

Isla-Rose Heasman, who was born with a lower incisor, had it removed when she was just 12 days old. "She had to have it taken out as it was wobbly," said her mother Jasmin, from Plymouth, Devon. "She was braver than me, she didn't really cry." Before extracting a tooth, dentists have to wait for at least 10 days after birth when the baby begins producing vitamin K, crucial for blood clotting. Staff at the Seven Trees Dental Access Centre said Isla-Rose was the youngest patient they had ever seen. Due to her age, she could not have an anaesthetic, just numbing cream. Most babies start teething at about six months, with some starting as young as four months old and others after a year. According to the British Dental Association, about one in 2,000 babies are born with natal teeth – which are teeth present above the gum line at birth. They are often loose because the roots are not properly developed. Professor Damien Walmsley, scientific advisor at the BDA, said: "The condition can lead to problems with breast feeding, ulceration of the child's tongue, and there is risk of a detached tooth entering the child's lungs. However these cases are extremely rare." *BBC News*, 3 Aug; *Sun*, *D.Mail*, *Guardian*, 4 Aug 2018. For a baby born with two front teeth, see **FT274:9**.



ABOVE: Six-month-old Chanco, sporting a luxuriant head of hair.

NECROLOG

This month, we wave off a controversial neuroscientist whose work frequently touched on fortean topics, and the discoverer of the Lindow Man bog body



ABOVE LEFT: Professor of psychology Michael A Persinger. ABOVE RIGHT: 'Pete Marsh', aka Lindow Man, the best-preserved bog body found in Britain.

MICHAEL PERSINGER

Persinger was professor of psychology at Laurentian University (Greater Sudbury, Ontario, Canada) from 1971 until his death. His research deserves a detailed fortean assessment, but meanwhile we'll give a brief biography largely drawn from online sources. His hypotheses of most interest to forteans include the temporal lobes as the central correlate for mystical experiences, subtle changes in geomagnetic activity as mediators of parapsychological phenomena, and the tectonic strain within the Earth's crust as the source of luminous phenomena attributed to UFOs. His major research themes included electromagnetic field effects upon biological organisms, epilepsy, temporal lobe functions, geophysical-human interactions, and the quantifiable examination of what he termed "low-probability phenomena" such as time travel, parallel universes, and the universe as a simulation.

He published over 500 technical articles in scientific journals, and seven books: *ELF and VLF electromagnetic field effects* (1974); *The paranormal* (1974); *The weather matrix and human behaviour* (1980);

TM and Cult Mania (1980); *Neuropsychological bases of God beliefs* (1987); and *Climate, buildings and behaviour* (1988). His book with Ghislaine Lafreniere, *Space-Time Transients and Unusual Events* (1977), documents the search for patterns in phenomena that are not compatible with current scientific paradigms (see "Earthquakes and Space-Time Transient Events" – an interview with Persinger by Dennis Stacy, **FT42:50-54**, autumn 1984).

Persinger argued that all phenomena including consciousness, spiritual experiences, and paranormal events can be explained by universal physical mechanisms, verified scientifically. He contended quantitative differences in energy, rather than qualitative distinctions, are responsible for the apparent mind-body duality, that the structure and function of the brain determine the boundaries of human perception of the Universe, and that shared quantitative values connect local phenomena with fundamental properties of the cosmos – expanding upon the work of Sir Arthur Eddington.

One of his notable experiments, spanning about three decades, involved the

so-called "God Helmet", whereby weak physiologically patterned magnetic fields were applied across the temporal lobes of hundreds of volunteers (see **FT205:4**). The research received wide media coverage with high-profile visitors to Persinger's laboratory including Susan Blackmore and Richard Dawkins reporting positive and negative results respectively. Experiences often associated with mystical reports such as OOBs, intrusive thoughts, and the sensed presence were reported by hundreds of volunteers, supposedly not associated with the subjects' suggestibility. Subsequent theory and quantitative electroencephalographic measurements supported the contention that the sensed presence of a "sentient being" could be a normal brain-based prototype for experiences of the divine or related mystical phenomena and was actually the left hemispheric awareness of the right hemispheric equivalent to the left hemispheric sense of self. FT's Paul Devereux tried another of Persinger's devices, the "Octopus" (see **FT201:39**), and reported: "The present writer found he was able to identify a photograph – without

any obvious communication – that someone else was looking at in another room." Richard Wiseman and others have said that Persinger's claims have not been replicated and that the "scientific jury is unconvinced". He has also been criticised for insufficient double blinding.

Michael A Persinger, neuroscientist, born Jacksonville, Florida 26 June 1945; died Sudbury, Ontario 14 Aug 2018, aged 73.

RICK TURNER

It was Rick Turner who excavated first century Lindow Man (dubbed 'Pete Marsh') from a Cheshire peat bog, the best-preserved bog body in Britain [**FT43:31**]. Turner was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1992 and in 2012 got an OBE for services to ancient monuments in Wales.

On 1 August 1984, workers cutting peat for use in gardens on Lindow Moss, near Wilmslow, uncovered a human leg and foot. A local journalist was tipped off and called Turner, the Cheshire county archaeologist, who investigated the bog the next day. The police at the time were searching for the body of a woman, the estranged wife of Peter Reyn-Bardt, who had disappeared 23 years earlier

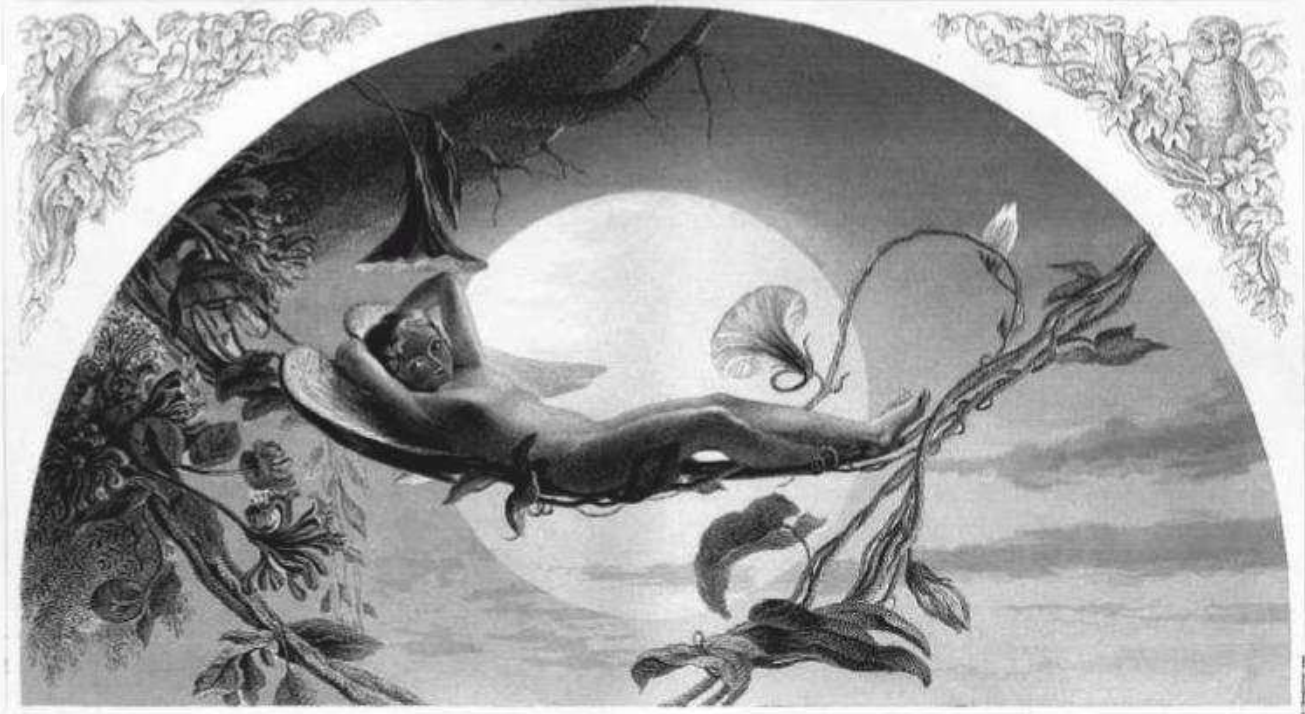


[FT42:37]. Reyn-Bardt had been serving a jail sentence for another crime, during which he boasted to two cellmates how he had murdered, dismembered and burnt his estranged wife Malika and buried her remains at the bottom of his garden – which overlooked Lindow Moss. On 13 May 1983 a peat cutter had unearthed the top part of a human skull with hair adhering to it and an eyeball still intact – a discovery that prompted Reyn-Bardt, assuming the remains to be those of Malika, to confess to her murder. In December 1983 he had been sentenced to life imprisonment, though by the time he came to trial, the skull had been carbon-dated to around AD 250.

When told of the new discovery in the bog, therefore, the police were convinced that they at last had their body. Turner was not so sure. He excavated the site on 6 August under police supervision. Carbon-dating subsequently placed the man's death sometime between 2 BC and AD 119. He was in his mid-20s, about 5ft 6in (1.7m) tall, with good teeth and fingernails, and had startlingly well-preserved hair and eyelashes. His short beard and moustache had been neatly trimmed, his skin painted green or blue, and he was naked except for a fox fur armband worn just above his right elbow. The absence of calluses on hands and feet indicated he had not been a manual labourer.

The police didn't have their murder victim, yet 'Pete Marsh' was indeed the victim of violence. He had been kneed in the back, garrotted, had his throat slit and his neck broken, got bashed over the head with a heavy object, perhaps a narrow-bladed axe, one blow sending splinters of skull deep into the brain, and was finally dumped face down into the bog pool. Whether punishment or ritual sacrifice is undetermined.

Richard Charles Turner, archaeologist, born Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria 24 April 1952; died from cancer 27 June 2018, aged 66.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

FAIRY DISORIENTATION

'Fairy disorientation' is the phenomenon whereby individuals get lost while walking through familiar spaces, particularly at night. The individual finds him or herself going round and round in circles in a small wood or unable to find a gate in a field. The old belief, one that can still be glimpsed in parts of Britain, was that the pixies had 'pixy-led' the innocent traveller (see FT323:25; 333:25; 350:25). But similar stories can be found in other parts of the world, where other bogeys are blamed by those who get lost. An important new article has come out on this subject by Mirjam Mencej: 'Something Came Over Him', *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* vol 7, no 1 (2018).

Mencej first became interested in stories of 'night witches' misleading travellers in Slovenia, but then broadened her sample to take in an impressive range of material from throughout Europe. She even identified a similar threefold experience that repeats in different locales: (i) disorientation; (ii) altered mind state; (iii) bright lights. I am unimpressed by the first two points. After all, disorientation is the core of the experience and an altered mind state seems a normal reaction to the confusion of unexpectedly getting lost: many readers will be familiar with the panic loop that kicks off. However, the lights are fascinating. Mencej has found several examples from Slovenia where people

out at night glimpse lights. "There where I lived... someone said that he went out in the night to pee... and he said he saw there were some lights and he was drawn by these lights because he didn't come back to the house. He lost his way." (A brave soul needs to write an article on nocturnal urinators having fortean experiences: there are many...) Partly on the basis of these mysterious lights, familiar too

from Britain, Mencej suggests that fairy disorientation is an extra-corporeal experience. The altered mind state is the subject detaching from their body, and the lights are a common part of the ECE: we are all familiar with 'travelling towards a bright light' in near-death experiences. I have a good deal of sympathy for the ECE explanation when people feel that they have been flying (e.g. some early modern witch narratives or experiences of being carried by the Devil), but in this case I'm not convinced. First, because the

disoriented individuals seem to be intensely conscious of their bodies: the sweat and the panic. Second, because the light in ECEs is usually large and static. Third, because, as Mencej herself admits, ECEs are most common "during relaxed yet wakeful states, usually in a recumbent position". But if I disagree about ECEs, Mencej is surely right that lights are a part of the puzzle. So *why* do these lights crop up in disorientation experiences?

Simon Young's new book *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies* is out now

A BRAVE SOUL
NEEDS TO WRITE
AN ARTICLE ON
NOCTURNAL
URINATORS
HAVING FORTEAN
EXPERIENCES



May the force be with you

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

ART GREENFIELD VS REALITY

It has been a recurring theme of my reports and ruminations here that there's nothing really new in ufology, and nothing of what's left that can't be recycled or reincarnated in some dubious guise or the other, and so it almost daily proves. The latest such example is concocted from President Trump's announcement that the US would create a sixth military arm, the Space Force. This would integrate and rationalise the various, sometimes conflicting and often overlapping and *ergo* inefficient interests that the other branches of the US military have in space, and in the sky defend satellites, clean up space debris, and keep an eye on what the bad guys are doing. And presumably will be able to pounce on them with lots of things that go bang (except in space, where no one can hear you scream).

Welcome to another monstrous military bureaucracy, then, and if you think it's all bullshit, then Art Greenfield is the man to agree with you. He has on offer a whole package of old, well-debunked stuff dressed up in freshly laundered, gaily-coloured pantaloons. He's announced that the US *already* has a Space Force, and stated that: "The governments of all countries must end all plans to make war on other countries... all countries need to prepare to defend ourselves from alien forces that will soon attack all of humanity." This news has been greeted with unflinching global indifference, as far as I can tell, but Art can justify his claim with nary a blink of an eye. First of all, the US captured "advanced anti-gravity craft" from the Nazis, "who used them against us in World War II". Of course they did. Our spacecraft look like "a bigger version of the

B-2 bomber, and if you saw it flying around you would think it was just a plane. No launch complex, launch pads, or runways are needed because anti-gravity propulsion can 'liftoff' from anywhere."

It turns out these fine craft can do faster-than-light speeds, too. That capacity seems to have been snatched from "the alien craft that crashed at Roswell, New Mexico in 1947". Art offers a link to illustrations of Third Reich postage stamps that are "concrete proof that the Nazis REALLY had anti-gravity craft", except none of said stamps shows anything like. But better yet: "Either our Repto Sapien alien cousins gave them the technology, or the Germans back-engineered a crashed UFO." And I bet you didn't know this: "Hitler himself had written that when he as a corporal on the battlefield in World War I, that he was picked up by two tall Reptilian beings and they frog-marched him to an underground base, and that he was VERY scared. I am fairly sure he was given an implant to mind-control him because he did several things before and during World War II which greatly assisted the Reptilian logistical human meat harvesting operation." Art doesn't indulge in details – natch – but, seriously, has anyone told David Icke about this? And do you see that point of light, with the flame at its tail, arcing away from the Earth? That's our Art rocketing away from reality. From that great distance he's able to recycle the legend that the late Ben Rich, one-time big cheese at Lockheed's 'Skunk Works', revealed that the US had "the technology to take ET home". He didn't quite say that, but what he did say was a *joke* (remember them?) – Peter Merlin took the whole Ben Rich legend apart in *SUNlite* 5:6 (<http://www.astronomyufo.com/UFO/>

*SUNlite*5_6.pdf). Lest we be in any doubt about Art Greenfield's seriousness, he also manages to dip arch-hokum-hawker Bob Lazar's toe into these murky waters. Lots more of this sort of thing, should you want it, can be found on Art's website: <https://antigraywarning.webs.com/>.

So, now you know The Truth, and may it set you free.

FOLLOWING THE MONEY

It's just over a year since Tom DeLonge's TTSaaS (To the Stars Academy of Arts and Science) launched itself (see **FT361:28** et seq) with an invitation to the innocent to invest in the enterprise at \$5 a share, sold in blocks of 200. The plan, or hope, was to raise \$50 million this way. Early on, the company's website was saying rather more than \$2 million-worth of shares had been sold, and then the numbers disappeared into the ether. That was still a long, long way from the \$50 million hoped for. TTSaaS has now filed a financial statement up to 30 June 2018 with the US Securities and Exchange Commission, which gives a rather different picture. This says that up to that date, somewhat over \$1 million had come in from the sale of stock, and shows the company is running a deficit of \$37,432,000. Oo-er, mum. Various ufological heads exploded when this news came out, and the instinctive question was *What have they spent all that spondulix on?*

It was the wrong question to ask. TTSaaS hadn't *spent* all that wampum, nor borrowed it neither, and doesn't owe it to anyone. It appears as a deficit because TTSaaS has given stock or stock options to various employees and contractors – *at its own valuation*. Which does seem to have been on the optimistic side of la-la land – though some might say that's characteristic of TTSaaS in general. The redoubtable Isaac Koi (who, by the way, we're pleased to see back in his ufological saddle) explains all this most lucidly on his UFO Inquiry blog (<https://ufoinquiry.blogspot.com/2018/10/unfair-and-misconceived-reporting-of.html>) so that even the semi-innumerate, whose brains turn to porridge at the sight of a balance sheet – such as yours truly – can understand it.

Otherwise TTSaaS has persisted in their policy of unfulfilled promises, prevarication and waffle. I shan't be bothering you with any more about them until they come up with something concrete. Don't, as the bishop said to the actress, hold your breath.



ABOVE: What Art offers up as "concrete proof that the Nazis REALLY had anti-gravity craft".



Oh, I do like to be beside the seaside!

JENNY RANGLES dips her toe back into the waters of UFO conferences at St Anne's on Sea

On 6 October 2018, I gave my first public lecture in 15 years at the LAPIS (Lancashire Anomalous Phenomena Investigation Society) conference in St Anne's on Sea, Lancashire. It was scary to be doing this after such a long break, and is not something I plan to do regularly, but it was fascinating to see how some things have changed and others have stayed the same.

This must have been at least the 50th conference I have lectured at since my first in 1975. I recall one 19 years ago in Washington where a rich entrepreneur predicted that we'd all be travelling in flying cars based on UFO technology by 2008. Ironically, the national press on the weekend of the LAPIS event, 10 years past that deadline, reported on a new prediction that there would be flying taxis over the roads of the UK by 2023. I won't be putting any money on that either.

At the time of my last UK conference speech in Southport, any fair-sized town had a UFO research group and many staged events like these annually, drumming up local interest in what they were doing. Members lectured on their latest cases, and lots of memorabilia of Adamski spaceships or videos of witnesses under hypnosis was sold to help pay the bills. Nowadays, even the few national associations still around, such as BUFORA, rarely stage this kind of event. They are expensive to run, while member numbers have dwindled and the Internet is so accessible that few will spend a week's wages travelling hundreds of miles to hear people talk about things they can find online or watch on YouTube for free.

I have been asked to do several talks since I tiptoed back into the public arena after years as a full-time carer. I could have gone to exotic locations that were leading the return of the UFO conference, but I'm reluctant to head down this gruelling route as I used to do when younger. However, the LAPIS conference was different. I used to live on the Fylde coast and lectured there when these were annual events, 25 years ago. A friend I have known for 43 years is a member; when she asked, I couldn't say no, despite my trepidation.

There was another reason that this event appealed. It was not just a UFO conference but covered a diverse range of topics presented by sensible researchers – a lot like the much-loved *FT* UnConventions. There was something for everyone. I got to see Scottish writer Peter McCue, who has interesting ideas on the nature of 'zones of strangeness' and UFO events that gel with my thinking. I also enjoyed a presentation on the investigation of hauntings by Ann Winsper, who is doing a



ABOVE: The Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port.

PhD in psychology and approaches hauntings much as I do UFOs. She is willing to consider evidence if probative, wherever it leads, but is aware that most things are going to turn out to have mundane explanations.

From different fields, we shared thoughts about misperception, misdirection and misunderstanding and how to ruthlessly cull data before something truly anomalous might emerge. I loved how she railed against the fad for 'orbs' photographed in haunted houses when scientific knowledge of camera optics explains almost all of them. But she was then willing to listen attentively to a woman from the audience who said that, while she agreed with this, she and several others had seen something orb-like emerge from a wall, float around and then go back into the wall. My mind flashed back to stories from UFO witnesses I had heard describing very similar behaviour from mini-UFOs, which I thought might be connected with atmospheric electrical phenomena like ball lightning. The continuity of experience across phenomena is exactly why such cross-disciplinary conferences can be so productive. You get to think outside of your own box.

Ann, like me, believes it's important to talk to the scientists and sceptics and consider their explanations. She even self-built a Persinger 'God Helmet' to induce psychic visions via energy fields that encase the brain. The data was then compared with cases of actual apparitions and the results run past the late Canadian scientist himself, who had applied his thinking to UFO events in the past. Again, we saw the ability to share knowledge across disparate fields to reveal the possibility that alien abduction experiences might be stimulated by immersing the brain in a bath of EM radiation, much as apparitions might be stimulated by energy fields.

Ann could also recognise when something real might actually have occurred. She shared a fascinating case report from the Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port on the Wirral, which her Para.Science team had investigated

in 1999. They obtained an intriguing photo of what seems to be a semi-visible man wearing old clothing in a specific part of the modern building, exactly where psychics had already sensed something strange. They discovered afterwards that it was the 100th anniversary of a terrible accident in which a man died after getting entangled in chains linked to the dock that predated the museum. None of them knew of this anniversary at the time of the investigation.

My own talk – "Time Storms, Near Death Falls and Lying Saucers" – was an attempt to sum up the three stages of the UFO experience as I have come to think of it during my hiatus from the field.

Stage 1: The 95 per cent that is IFO data, which reveals how our brains are primed to perceive anomalies that we then interpret within the framework of whatever the prevailing zeitgeist says. These are not irrelevant. They are key.

Stage 2: Achieved via the gateway of the Oz Factor, taking susceptible people with a track record of mini-blackouts into a close encounter with something. This bridges the inner space of misperception with a physically real event which emits potentially dangerous energy.

Stage 3: Where the visually creative witness enters a profound experience after stage 2 contact, with time going gaga. This is interpreted as many different things, from apparitions to out-of-body states and near-death experiences or alien abductions.

How anyone interprets the message, be it a near-death vision of wise beings in heaven or aliens lecturing them inside a spaceship, may be highly personal. But all experiencers report a sense that their mind touches an infinite, timeless, super-consciousness that is providing information about many things they normally have no ability to comprehend. As one witness told me: "This filled my head like hundreds and thousands". Another said that "it was a profound spiritual encounter, like a communion with God."

Obviously, it goes much deeper than this, but it helped me shape a thesis that hopefully I will write more about in a coherent manner in coming months. Indeed, this enjoyable dip into the world that used to be my everyday reality for over 30 years left me eager to start writing something more substantial to focus these nascent thoughts. Perhaps after this conference a new book will be on the horizon in 2019. But if an event like this crops up again next year then the opportunity for inspiration and cross-pollination may again prove too tempting to resist!

COME AWAY! O HUMAN CHILD! CHANGELINGS

Stories of the supernatural abduction of children span the centuries and point the finger of blame variously at gods, witches and extraterrestrials. The most common culprits, though, are fairies, and in this extract from his new book, **JOSHUA CUTCHIN** explores the folklore around their practice of replacing human infants with their own insatiable offspring...

*Come away! O, human child!
To the woods and waters wild,
With a fairy hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you
can understand.*

— WB Yeats, “The Stolen Child”

Once upon a time there was a couple blessed with a beautiful baby boy. They were happy as they could be, until one day the mother went sheep shearing and left the child in its crib. Upon returning, she found the infant wailing in an unusual manner. Thinking him hungry, she attempted to feed the babe, but he proved insatiable.

Around the same time, a tailor called to work upon some homespun cloth. “Pay no mind to the boy if he cries,” said the mother, returning to her shearing duties. “I’ll tend to him when I return.”

Several hours later, the tailor was startled to see the baby reach to a nearby shelf for a bagpipe chanter. He took the instrument and played a lively tune, filling the house with a dancing fairy host. The tailor was compelled to join in.

Two hours later, the playing ceased and the fairies disappeared. “Tell not my mother what happened today,” the infant said, and when she returned the tailor had no defence for why his task was left undone.

When the tailor arrived the next day to finish his work, the entire series of events unfolded as it had the day before. This time, when the mother demanded an explanation, he said: “I urge upon you after going to bed tonight not to fondle that child, because he is not your child, nor is he a child: he is an old fairy man. And tomorrow, at dead tide, go down to the shore and wrap him in your plaid and put him upon a rock and begin to pick that shell-fish which is called limpet, and for your life do not leave the shore until such a time as the tide will flow so high that you will scarcely be able to wade in to the main shore.”

The mother did as told, and while wading, the infant spoke. “You had a great need to do what you have done,” he said. “Otherwise



*The tailor was
startled to see the
baby reach for a
bagpipe chanter*

you’d have seen another ending of your turn but blessing be to you and curses on your adviser.” Upon returning home, she found her own boy, not the changeling, in his cradle.

“The Tailor and the Changeling” is one of the most popular and geographically widespread fairy stories, even imported to

LEFT: A changeling is detected when the son of a Herefordshire household brews beer in eggshells – a common motif in changeling lore.

America by Scottish immigrants.

Innumerable variations exist: sometimes the tailor takes things into his own hands, sometimes the dancers are absent, sometimes the method of resolution differs. But the motifs of the tailor, the changeling, and the music remain the same.

“The smallness of fairies... and the belief in changelings are the two most prominent characteristics of the Fairy-Faith,” wrote Evans Wentz in his 1911 *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*. The scenario plays out in a nearly identical manner every time: an oft-unhappy mother leaves her child, usually a boy, unattended; the babe exhibits undesirable traits and/or appearance; advice is sought of a wise man or woman; a ritual is carried out, usually a Christian rite – other strategies include abuse, abandonment, or an effort to bewilder the changeling – and the original, mortal child is returned to the parents.

Abundant, vaguely cited tales can be found at the murky intersection of fact, folklore, and fiction. A story from John Rhys’s *Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx* (1901) tells how the *Tylwyth Teg* stole a baby from its dozing grandmother, leaving behind “a slender, wizened old man moving restlessly and peevishly about” – a *crimbil*, or changeling. Its mother found the child inconsolable and hideous, and a man “skilled in the secrets of the spirits” was fetched from Trawsfynydd. He advised they trace the shape of a cross in salt on a shovel, heated in a fire. The sight of this made the changeling flee through a window, and the actual child appeared on the doorstep unharmed. One novel story from Croker’s 1828 *Fairy Legends & Traditions of the South of Ireland* tells of two Scottish whisky distributors who, while measuring their load in a friend’s cottage, heard her infant shriek in its crib. The mother comforted the child, making the sign of the cross over it as the





ABOVE: The Devil steals a baby and leaves a changeling behind in a detail from “The Legend of St Stephen” by Martino di Bartolomeo, early 15th century.

BELOW: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm included several changeling tales in their collections. The caption to this illustration in a 1922 edition of their stories reads: “The elves once took a child away from its mother, and left in its place a changeling with a big head and staring eyes, who did nothing but eat and drink”.

distributors left. When they drove off, a child – recognised as their friend’s – was found in the road. The distributors surmised the fairies had attempted to take the babe but were unable to complete the theft after its mother intervened. Pressed for time, they cared for the child and returned a fortnight later, finding the mother at her wit’s end: the child at home was sickly and crying constantly. The distributors presented her real child and “lighted a bundle of straw to throw the changeling in, but at the sight of it the Elf made its escape through the chimney.”

In an old story from northern Germany, a mother was convinced her baby was a dwarfen changeling. Following the advice of a friend, she brewed oil and placed empty walnut shells about the fire. The child asked what she was doing, and she replied, “Brewing beer”. The child said, “Now I am old as the Harz Wood, and I’ve never seen anything like this, my entire life long. Brewing beer in walnut shells!” His identity revealed, the mother threatened to kill the changeling if he did not bring her child back. The dwarf asked her to leave the cottage, and when she returned, her baby had also.

James MacDougall’s *Folk Tales and Fairy Lore in Gaelic and English* (1910) records the tale of a Glengarry widow with a young son



who went to the well to fetch water. When she returned, the boy was screaming, and nothing could silence him. As she took him to her breast, she spied teeth and a withered face, and knew he was a changeling. The next day she took him to the river. “A bug burn ran across her path, and when she was going over the ford, the creature put his head out of the shawl and said: ‘Many a big fold have I seen on the banks of this stream!’” She tossed the child into the river below the ford, “then heard a sound like that of a flock of birds flying about her.” At her feet was her true child.

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm adapted several German changeling tales for their

famous collections. “A mother had her child taken from the cradle by elves. In its place they laid a changeling with a thick head and staring eyes who would do nothing but eat and drink. In distress she went to a neighbour and asked for advice. The neighbour told her to carry the changeling into the kitchen, set it on the hearth, make a fire, and boil water in two eggshells. That should make the changeling laugh, and if he laughs it will be all over with him. The woman did everything just as her neighbour said. When she placed the eggshells filled with water over the fire, the blockhead said: ‘Now I am as old as the Wester Wood, but have never seen anyone cooking in shells.’ And he began laughing about it. When he laughed, a band of little elves suddenly appeared. They brought the rightful child, set it on the hearth, and took the changeling away.”

Any unbaptised baby presented an opportunity for a fairy exchange, and some families were unfortunately changeling-prone. Lady Wilde, collector of Irish folk tales and mother of Oscar, told of a family who had slighted the fairy folk and had no less than six changelings, each of whom pined away and died. A family could also suffer multiple changelings at the same time: there is one story of changelings who were twins.

A HISTORY OF BELIEF

The word “changeling” originally meant “turncoat”. Later it evoked royal children substituted to some nefarious end before becoming closely associated, alongside the word “ex-changeling,” with fairies. While changeling belief was most robust in the British Isles, identical tales were told throughout Europe. Scandinavians called them by a host of names: *killkrack*, *skiptingr*, *vixlingr*, and *bytingr* (the last term was once an insult in Iceland). Germanic peoples had multiple terms as well: in Holland they were called *wisselkind*, likely derived from the German *wechselkind*; *wechselbalg* was popular, but it was also common to hear *dickkopf* or *kielkropf* (anglicised as *killcrop* and used to denote not only a changeling, but a spontaneously aborted foetus as well). Polish mothers feared the *Dziwozony*, tall women of the woods fond of taking a human baby and leaving their own kind in its place. Other Slavic countries called changelings *divious*, *premien*, *podmenek*, or *odmien ce*, depending on one’s geography and ethnic group.

Like the origins of fairies themselves, the changeling legend’s genesis is up for debate. Though adults are lured to Fairyland in pagan stories, belief in the substitution of children does not pre-date Christianity in Ireland, suggesting roots in Abrahamic tradition (at least in Europe; global traditions undermine this assumption).

The Babylonian Talmud described the concept of *b’nei temurah*, a “child of substitution,” created when parents thought of someone other than their spouse during conception. The *Zohar* clarified the concept, declaring, “The body of the child that [a father] begets is called ‘a changeling’ [because the body was created while the father ‘changed’ his thoughts during procreation].”

Some scholars cite fifth century church father Saint Augustine’s exegesis of Psalm 17, which spoke of estranged children (*fili alieni*), “not worthy of being called mine, aliens who were rightly told ‘You are of your father the Devil’” as another step in the evolution of the belief. Though more likely anti-Semitic rhetoric than an account of changelings, it illustrates the early Church’s language as a guiding factor.

In the 13th century, William of Auvergne, philosophical theologian and Bishop of Paris, wrote “the earliest extant texts to mention the actual substitution story.” Using the Latin term *cambio* (from *cambiti*, “exchanged”), William described “the sons of *incubi demons*”, thin and insatiable, left with mortal mothers. He maintained these were not literal substitutions but instead demonic illusions, explaining their sudden disappearance when banished.

Suffice to say the belief was ensconced in Europe by at least the 1200s, if not earlier. Christianity and the Fairy Faith syncretised around a shared belief in changelings to the extent that Martin Luther, father of the Protestant Reformation, “saw and touched”



“It did nothing but eat; in fact, it ate enough for any four peasants”

one in Dessau in 1532: “It was 12 years old, and from its eyes and the fact that it had all of its senses, one could have thought that it was a real child. It did nothing but eat; in fact, it ate enough for any four peasants or threshers. It ate, shit, and pissed, and whenever someone touched it, it cried. When bad things happened in the house, it laughed and was happy; but when things went well, it cried... Therefore, I said: ‘Then you should have all Christians repeat the Lord’s Prayer

in church that God may exorcise the Devil.’” They did this daily at Dessau, and the changeling child died in the following year.

The Church also exhibited a general distrust of midwives and assumed their complicity in swapping children. A 1554 treatise on the practice by Jacob Rueff blamed changelings on Satan, and by 1567 English midwives were forced to swear they would aid neither the Devil nor mortals in exchanging mortal infants.

The notion that changelings might be explained by spirit possession is one fortune seekers should carefully consider. The idea, popular among Victorian occultists, was considered by Evans Wentz, and folkloric evidence suggests the idea of fairy “walk-ins”, or possessions, were possible, particularly near death.

On balance, ufological connections should not be dismissed either. As early as 1638 authors were playing with the idea of changelings and extraterrestrials: *The Man in the Moon: or a Discourse of a Voyage Thither*, a work of fiction by Francis Godwin, told of superior Lunar inhabitants who exchanged problem infants with healthy Earthlings, and modern ufological lore has produced many analogues to changelings.

For at least 500 years changelings have influenced our popular culture. The trope and its variants inspired Shakespeare, Brontë, Dickens, and Yeats, to name but a few. Lest changeling tales seem too distant and mythic, consider that in 19th century Ireland there were several recorded changeling killings (see FT324:25) and that Evans Wentz spoke with numerous individuals, circa 1911, who still believed fairies stole mortal infants.

CHANGELING ATTRIBUTES

The changeling story is not only consistent in its narrative beats but also in its description of changelings. They were, to put it bluntly, hideous. Perhaps Peter



TOP: Martin Luther claimed to have seen and touched a changeling in Dessau in 1532: “It ate, shit and pissed”. ABOVE: Midwives were suspected by the Church of being involved in the swapping of children.

THIEVES IN THE NIGHT: SUPERNATURAL CHILD ABDUCTIONS

“Those are my persons!”

Until this moment, the California mother and her two-year-old son had lived an uncomplicated life. It all changed when the boy found the book splayed on the floor, eliciting kisses and affection. It was his mother’s copy of Budd Hopkins’s *Intruders*, the 1987 work that further popularised the alleged “alien abduction” phenomenon. The objects of the child’s affection were illustrations of spindly, large headed, black-eyed alien “Greys,” a depiction now engrained in popular culture.

Suffice to say, this outpouring of emotion alarmed his mother. She listened, disturbed, as her son described a “woman and man” who took him aboard some type of craft for regular physical examinations. Further details emerged when the mother and son spoke to John P Timmerman, who interviewed them on behalf of the Center for UFO Studies in 1988. Each encounter began with being “flown out the window” into a multicoloured “spaceship” where the entities told the boy to remain calm while they “hurt” his eyes, forehead, and mouth. Chillingly, the interview concluded when he whispered to his mother that the beings would “get mad at him” for speaking with Timmerman. “They’re my friends.”

Regardless of the account’s veracity, the boy’s story suggests an unsettling trend: are children, for whatever reason, more prone to paranormal activity?

Perhaps such encounters are simply “tall tales”, such as we all invented in our youth. But to the fortean, these stories carry more weight, fitting into an historical continuum of interaction with the supernatural realm. The remarkable consistency of such accounts, recorded since mankind’s earliest days, suggests something more objective than mere storytelling is at work.

If such accounts are true, perhaps children are subject to paranormal encounters because their souls, freshly minted, are not so far removed from the Otherworld. In animistic cultures, children are more susceptible to spirit-borne illnesses than adults, their souls weaker and



not fully attached to the physical form. From another perspective, perhaps paranormal-prone youths possess greater innate psychic aptitude; research conducted by English ghost investigator Andrew Green suggested psychic intuition peaks in the general population around the age of seven before taking a backseat to the adult values of logic and intellect.

“What fascinates me is why so many children have recently been witness to UFO experiences,” researcher David Rees wrote in 1979. He also noted how some sightings over densely populated areas are exclusively witnessed by children, who also prove steadfast in their accounts. “Is it that the children are ‘tuned in’ to see something – and if so, what?”

Today’s children continue to encounter a robust spectrum of alleged paranormalia. They recall past lives with greater ease, serve as the focus for poltergeist activity, entertain imaginary friends, and witness entities, apparitions, UFOs, and cryptids with an apparent frequency far greater than adults. They are also abducted more often.

For millennia, parents worldwide have tightly clutched their babies in the fear that *something* from the darkness will steal them away: madmen, spirits, fairies, demons, beasts, monsters, or – in the case of our technology-obsessed, materialist society – extraterrestrials from another galaxy.

One of the earliest documented examples of paranormal child abduction comes from a nearly 1,600-year-old account following a cataclysmic earthquake. According to the historian Nicephorus, the people of Constantinople had gathered in the countryside to pray when a child was abruptly pulled into the air by some unseen force, then quickly returned to Earth. It was deemed the work of angels. The case bears a striking resemblance to the poltergeist plaguing the East German village of Sandfeldt where, for three months in 1722, children would be dangled in mid-air in front of numerous witnesses – or even vanished altogether, reappearing only after much fuss and worry from their parents.

By some accounts, as many as 800,000 children are reported missing each year in the United States alone; if a mere fraction of a per cent of these disappearances results from supernatural predation, it warrants attention – which, for my purposes, means focusing upon Western interpretations of fairy folklore and the pernicious alien abduction phenomenon.

To the well-read fortean, tales of child abduction are reflective of a more salacious trend: the preoccupation supernatural forces have with human reproduction and hybridity. It is one of the field’s most consistent themes and predates the formation of modern religion. Mankind’s crossbreeding with the alien Other appears in folklore across the globe. The fairies of yesteryear abducted young ladies for lovers from the British Isles, hairy hominids stole and bred with America’s First Nations women, today’s aliens snatch us out of bed to collect our gametes – the list is practically endless.

Pinpointing which entity was first blamed for missing children is difficult. Thousands of spirits have been accused throughout human history, a majority of their names lost to time. Certainly, the *pmere kwetethe* of Australian aboriginal lore are candidates, given their association with the oldest civilisation on Earth, but there is no shortage of guilty contenders worldwide.

Abrahamic religions, on the other hand, can clearly trace their beliefs in paranormal child abduction to Lilith. First appearing in a Hebrew inscription circa 800 BC, Lilith likely has earlier antecedents in Mesopotamian mythology: ancient Sumerians spoke of the bird-footed, lion-headed Lamashtu, a spirit fond of stealing children, even from the womb, only to kill them by nursing (one sees these same motifs in Hindu mythology, where the demoness Putana nursed the infant god Krishna in an attempt to kill him with poisoned milk). Other scholars contend that Lilith may have grown out of belief in Obyzouth, a demoness from the first century *Testament*

of Solomon. Whatever her origins, Lilith appears in numerous ancient texts, listed alongside monsters and other unclean beasts.

Less surreptitious than Lilith, but equally unsettling, was Moloch. According to Hebrew tradition, the ram-headed Canaanite god demanded child sacrifices of his followers, who placed their offspring in his idol's arms, outstretched over a roaring furnace. These biblical anxieties naturally found their way into the folklore of Europe, placing children under perennial threat from supernatural sources. Fairy tales like "Rumpelstiltskin", wherein an imp imprisons a miller's daughter, took root shortly after Eastern and Western Indo-European languages split, 4,000 to 5,000 years ago. Sometime before 1592 a stained glass window was installed in a German church depicting a mysterious musician leading children from their homes; whether the 14th century Pied Piper of Hamelin incident was real or a metaphor for disease, starvation, or the Children's Crusade of 1212 remains uncertain.

These anxieties returned centuries later, when a wave of "bogus social workers" swept the US and particularly the UK in the early 1990s, showing up at homes with false credentials and a preternatural knowledge of the family's activities. After expressing their intent to examine or take the children of the household into their custody, these odd visitors fled at the slightest sign of parental suspicion. None was ever caught, and evidence of their existence remains elusive, outside of eyewitness testimony (see **FT57:43-45, 66:48-49, 77:36-38, 98:14-15, 270:10-11**).

The 21st century has given birth to at least one new legend, the fictional Internet sensation "Slender Man." This lanky, besuited wraith, created in an online contest, is said to target children. Despite its fictitious origins, anyone doubting the archetype's power need only refer to the 2014 case in which a 12-year-old girl was nearly fatally stabbed to death by two of her peers in hopes of appeasing the entity (**FT317:30-37**).

Perhaps no region's folklore has contributed more to these modern expressions of paranormal child abduction than the British Isles. Here, we see a rich repetition of foundational motifs to which today's interpretations owe a direct debt. Amidst verdant hills, weathered heaths, and imposing cliffs, the children of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland were under near-constant threat of being spirited away by the land's first inhabitants – the fairies.



ABOVE LEFT: Henry Fuseli's *The Changeling* (1780) shows a witch disappearing through a window with a baby while its mother discovers the child's hideous replacement in the crib and the nurse sleeps on.

Christen Asbjørnsen, reteller of Norwegian folktales, dramatised their appearance best: "The child looked like an old man with a weather-beaten face, his eyes were as red as fire, and glowed like an owl's eyes in the dark. He had a head as long as a horse's head and as round as a cabbage; the legs were as thin as a sheep's, and his body looked like last year's dried mutton."

These were the general attributes, moderately embellished, expected from fairy imposters.

Stature and body shape: Changelings, nearly always boys, were commonly deformed or hunch-backed. They were consistently tiny, sometimes hyperbolically so ("not as big as a mushroom," Lady Wilde claimed), remaining small their entire lives, no matter how long. One German tale described a two-year-old "no longer than a shoe," one Irish changeling was the size of a three-year-old at age six, and Evans Wentz was told of a 20-year-old no bigger than an infant. They had "pale, wrinkled skin as that of an old person."

Build and weight: Alexander MacGregor described the changeling in *Highland Superstitions* (1901) as "a withered, little, living skeleton of a child." It always seemed they were "dying, yet would not die." This weakness was a hallmark of changelings. "They are always ailing and do not grow..." it is written in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, "though they are very heavy." This description matches superstitions surrounding demonic succubi and incubi,

whose offspring were believed frail-yet-heavy.

Head, neck, and eyes: The German names *kielkropf* and *dickkopf* directly reference the large head and neck of changelings (meaning "crop in the throat" and "thick head", respectively). North German peasants believed small, grey *nickerts* replaced their infants with tiny, large-headed changelings. Eyes were occasionally described as burning like coals, "goggly", "big", "bulging", or "large [and] unblinking".

Limbs: "His hands were like kite's claws, and his legs were no thicker than the handle of a whip, and about as straight as a reaping-hook," wrote Yeats in his *Irish Fairy Tales* (1892). Limbs were awkward, sometimes growing too quickly, and often short.

Face: Changeling faces were shrivelled, pinched, and withered. They were sometimes recognised by failure to teethe or grow hair, while other times too many teeth, long teeth, or even fangs gave them away. Beards were a dead giveaway, of course. A Scottish child born with a caul over its face was considered a changeling.

Voice: "The ugly, shrivelled Elf in the Irish legend speaks in a snarling and piercing tone, which terrifies men," wrote Croker. "As a changeling, he does not speak at all, but howls and screams in a frightful manner; and, if compelled, his voice sounds like that of a very old man". Their voices were described as "small and squeaky" or "hollow".

Occasionally the exchange went

unnoticed, the fairy *glamour*, or illusion, being strong enough to make the changeling appear mortal for a time. Welsh fairies took well-behaved and handsome children, leaving behind an identical *plenty-n-newid* that slowly turned hideous. Greek fairies took children but usually returned them; if not, the exchanged fairy never revealed its true self until adulthood.

Rarer still – but not unheard of – were beautiful changelings. In a 1726 visit to the Isle of Man, George Waldron described a changeling as beautiful beyond compare, with a delicate complexion and fine hair, but entirely immobile with long, thin limbs. The child seldom smiled, “but if anyone called him Fairy-Elf, he would frown and fix his eyes so earnestly on those who said it, as if he would look them through.”

All changelings made unpleasant company. They cried nonstop in an inhuman wail and were generally “cross and ill-tempered.” Their reputation was so notorious that parents of peevish children might jest that their true offspring were taken by the fairies. “When we see a child good for nothing we say: ‘Ah, you little faery,’” the Irish folklorist and dramatist Lady Gregory was told. One man claimed his son was taken and swapped with “an idiot” who made “very disagreeable screaming sounds”.

Changelings were also listless, appearing as dullards around their “parents” and avoiding eye contact. Even when of age, they never walked – unless alone. Irish writer Thomas Keightley, in *The Fairy Mythology* (1828), described one changeling: “...when there was no one in the place, he was in great spirits, ran up the walls like a cat... but sat dozing at the end of the table when any one was in the room with him.” They were believed to engage

in all sorts of raucous activity when alone, such as dancing, stealing and breaking valuables, having their hair combed by fairies, and playing music.

Anyone spying upon a changeling might catch a demonstration of its musicianship. Many tales mention them playing bagpipes when alone, usually in variations on “The Tailor & the Changeling” – in Lady Wilde’s retelling, the baby played “such sweet music” on four straws “as if they were pipes”. Sometimes the instrument is a fiddle, as in one variant told to Evans Wentz, or “The Fairy Child of Close Ny Lheiy”, a version contemporaneously published in Sophia Morrison’s *Manx Fairy Tales* (1911). These musical abilities magically compelled listeners to dance.

Around others, changelings only showed enthusiasm in their insatiability, existing to “only eat and cry” for more. They were constantly “wawling and crying for food and attention in an apparent state of paralysis,” wrote Katharine Briggs. No amount of food satisfied or fattened changelings, who in some accounts ate four times more than mortal infants or as much as a grown man (one notable exception is George Waldron’s beautiful changeling who, keeping with its contrarian nature, *never ate*). Evans Wentz recorded one story

where the babe’s usual diet of porridge and milk could not ease its hunger; perhaps, as believed on the Scottish Isle Benbecula, only meat could satisfy it.

So prodigious was their appetite that fairies sometimes left behind a sort of alimony to help raise the changeling, small sums placed in the same location of the home daily provided the family told no one their secret. In “The Gors Goch Changeling”, a *Tylwyth Teg* host was allowed inside an English home to wash their children, leaving money behind in appreciation but exchanging the family’s infant for one of their own. The mother died of a broken heart while the father prospered on fairy riches.

While most changelings were infants, adults (particularly young women and mothers) were susceptible as well. Danish legend tells of a smith who rescued a pregnant woman from a troll. After helping her give birth to twins, the smith escorted the wife to her husband and discovered a changeling in her place, which he hacked to pieces. Changelings were also used to scapegoat adults whose behaviour abruptly changed, as in the legend of young Rickard the Rake, who – following his collapse at a feast – emerged from his convalescence ornery and insatiable.

In many cases these adult changelings simply appeared ill or as a corpse. The Irish commonly held that anyone with consumption or other wasting diseases was in good health in Fairyland, while the physical body represented a changeling. Women who passed away in childbirth were not dead, they were taken by the fairies. Once more, the connection with the dead makes categorisation of abduction difficult and raises the question: what *were* changelings, anyway?

Fairies sometimes left behind a sort of alimony to raise the changeling



ABOVE: In this illustration to a Scottish changeling tale, a wise woman ‘riddles’ a changeling over rowan smoke to reveal its true identity to the boy’s parents.

TRUE IDENTITIES

Given the fairy/dead connection it should come as no surprise that a handful of grim accounts actually describe changelings as dead children. In one Irish tale, a morning commuter heard two fairy women at an open window say: “There is a beautiful boy in this house, go in and hand it out to me, and we’ll leave the dead child in its place.” The commuter, signing the cross over the sleeping boy, intercepted the exchange and restored the baby to its mother.

Such tales are rare, however. As one might surmise from their wizened visages, changelings were more often thought to be old fairies, hence their advanced abilities of musical performance and speech.

“I have heard my father say it was the case that fairy women used to take away children from their cradles and leave different children in their places,” said 94-year-old John Campbell, who spoke to Evans Wentz. “And that these children who were left would turn out to be old men.”

Attempts to explain the incongruity of infantile bodies and aged faces led many 19th century occultists to declare changelings had less to do with fairy folk and more with “the souls of the dead returned to inhabit the bodies of mortal children,” i.e., reincarnation. Lady Gregory anecdotally provided support for this notion via the tale of an old Aran man who, three days after his death, “appeared in the cradle as a baby” with “an old look on his face”. “He won’t be with you long,” a wise woman told the mother. “He had three deaths to die, and this is the second.” The child passed away six years later.

Icelandic folklore held that fairy women “go to the cradles of young babies, and take with them their husbands, 80 years old, whom they knock, and kick, and squeeze until they are small enough to get into the cradle”. In one story, a startled mother saw her changed “child” yawn and stretch all the way up to the rafters of the house; perhaps the heavy weight of changelings was due to this compression.

Alongside these beliefs, others contended changelings were fairy babies who just so happened to *look* elderly, possibly due to illness. Welsh folklorist Elias Owen wrote that “the Fairies exchanged their own weakly or deformed offspring” with mortal babies, while Yeats also contended it was “some sickly fairy child,” not an elder, left behind.

Abandonment of fairy children to mortals was not always consensual on the behalf of their Otherworldly parents. The story of “Coleman Gray” tells of an abandoned *piskie* child adopted into a Welsh family, raised to good health; after some time, its parents



LEFT: A sculpture created by special effects artist Russell Baker showing a changeling baby reverting to its original log or fetch form.

heard the fairies working on his wife’s stock, shouting: “Mind da crooked finger!” The man lit a candle, opened a Bible, and grabbed a knife; the fairies were frightened by this, and fled when he tossed the Bible into the cowshed. Inside he found a carved effigy of his wife, accurate down to her deformed finger, which he used for a chopping board thenceforth.

This deception was not limited to changelings – sometimes stocks were used for simple pranks. Dinah Moore of the Isle of Man told Evans Wentz: “One night the man was out on horseback and heard a little baby crying beside the road. He got off his horse to get the baby, and, taking it home, went to give it to his wife, and it was only a block of wood. And then the old fairies were outside yelling at the man: “*Eash un oie, s’cheap t’ou mollit!* (Age one night, how easily thou art deceived!)”

Stocks could also replace limbs and digits, usually as a result of a wrathful whirlwind, or “faerie blast”. Anyone unfortunate or foolish enough to cross

a fairy might suffer this affliction, resulting in a pustule or tumour-like protrusion on an arm or leg, filled with detritus: grass, moss, splinters, and so on.

Variations on stock/fetch changelings included bits of sod, turf, a broom wrapped in cloth, or a waxen effigy stuck with pins, all left as placeholders for mortal children. The last example comes from the Celtic black magic practice of a “corp criadh” – essentially a Gaelic voodoo doll used to inflict consumptive illness.

In spite of various “fairy artefacts” collected over the years – miniscule chalices, pipes, shoes, jackets, flags, and so on – no fairy stock, or any of the above substitutes, has ever been found. Dr Hugh Cheape, Curator of Scottish Modern Collections, said that although the National Museums of Scotland are “comprehensive... I must say I do not have an example of this. I have looked at similar collections in other museums in Scotland and England and have never seen such a thing.”

This article has been condensed and extracted (and its copious references removed for want of space) from *Thieves in the Night: A Brief History of Supernatural Child Abductions*, by Joshua Cutchin, published by Anomalist Books, 2018.

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came and retrieved the child, never to be seen again.

In another unique tale, the fairies left behind a hairy changeling, quickly rescued by its mother. “This is my own child that was stolen from me tonight because my people wanted to take your beautiful baby,” she told the parents. “But I’d rather have ours; if you let me take him I will tell you how to get your child back.” They were instructed to burn “three sheaves” at the nearby fairy mound, threatening to burn the fairies’ home if their child was not returned.

GLAMOURED LOGS

Arguably the most intriguing changeling tradition held they were not living beings at all, but instead *fetches* or *stocks*, logs cloaked in glamour to appear as living children. Fairies had a knack for masking rubbish as something different, including food, so stocks were a natural extension of this ability. Belief that changelings were inanimate hunks of wood was a reference to their immobility, described by one father as “stiff as an aik tree, unable to move”.

In Yeats’s retelling of “Jamie Freel & the Young Lady,” the protagonist saw “the young lady lifted and carried away” by the fairies, “while the stick which was dropped in her place on the bed took her exact form.” Another female changeling, the grown protagonist of the Finnish folktale “The Kantele Player”, throws her imposter into a roaring fire, revealing it as an alder stump.

Stocks were commonly employed when abducting new mothers, or mothers and children. In one famous tale, a husband

IF YOU WERE THE ONLY GUL IN THE WORLD

RICHARD FREEMAN and company carry on up the Romit Valley in search of some aggressive and rapey apemen (and women) – the fabled and rather terrifying *guls* of Tajikistan...

Two cryptozoologists and a reporter walk into a pub...

The venue is Mr Fogg's Tavern, a Victorian theme pub on St Martin's Lane in London's Covent Garden. Our meeting place is a little conceit of mine: after all, between the three of us we must be at least as well travelled as Jules Verne's eponymous globe-trotting adventurer.

Dr Chris Clark has been on almost every expedition the Centre for Fortean Zoology has ever mounted, and for some years had expressed an interest in visiting the Central Asian country of Tajikistan. The idea was to search for relic hominins, possible offshoots of one of the ancestors of humans or their relatives. In the 1950s, during the Soviet era, Russian polymath Boris Porshnev had visited the country with the Snowman Commission (see **FT298:30-34, 315:40-44**) and had spoken to many witnesses whose sightings reached back into the 19th century.¹

Looking online for more recent sightings, I had stumbled across an article entitled "Tajikistan: Search for the Yeti" in the online magazine *Standpoint*. The author was a journalist called Ben Judah, who had written the piece back in 2010. In it he recounts visiting the Romit Valley and meeting witnesses, people who claimed to have seen – and even to have been attacked by – hairy, man-like beasts whom they feared more than the mujahideen. Judah's own guide had been chased by a black-haired creature with dangling breasts 10 years previously while out searching for firewood in the mountains. Travelling around the region, Judah talked to more witnesses: another man attacked by a black-haired female creature; one who saw a manlike beast attack his donkey; and a youth of 15 who'd watched a hairy, monkey-like creature climbing over rocks just four days before – despite the fact that there are no monkeys in Tajikistan. The author could not decide if what was being described was a living creature or a living myth. I decided to



LEFT: Nearly all *gul* witnesses said that Justin Osbourn's classic painting of the Fouke Monster most closely resembled what they had encountered. **FACING PAGE:** The mountains of the Romit Valley.

word meaning 'to tear'. In Middle Eastern folklore these were desert-dwelling, human-like demons who emerged at night to feed on human corpses: it is from *gul* that we derive the world ghoul.

The creatures were generally described as man-sized, hairy, with monkey-like faces and a foul smell. They seemed to be far smaller than the yeti, and more like the almasty of Russia, which we had previously mounted an expedition to search for (see **FT246:46-52**). Ben was still undecided as to the nature of the *gul*, wondering if it were flesh or fable. He had noted, though, that as his travels took him above the tree line and into the Pamir Mountains, the stories of the *gul* dried up. I suggested that if these stories were just make-believe, then they would surely have been carried to the communities who lived in the barren wastes above the tree line; but a real creature needs food and shelter and would, of necessity, be a forest dweller.

Ben had hoped to accompany us on the mooted expedition, but sadly could not get financial backing from any of the newspapers or magazines he wrote for. However, we would instead be joined by Dave Archer, another stalwart of CFZ expeditions and an eyewitness to the orang-pendek of Sumatra. With the most recent sightings emanating from the Romit Valley, it was there we decided to head.

ARRIVAL

In June of 2018 we found ourselves in Dushanbe, Tajikistan's capital city. We were met at the airport by our guide, interpreter and fixer, a young man named Daldat. We paid a quick visit to the local museum, where there was a display of Neanderthal tools

The creatures were described as man-sized, hairy, and with a foul smell

contact him.

And so we sat in the pub and talked hominins over gin and roast beef. Ben told us that almost every person he'd spoken to in the Romit Valley had seen one of the creatures or knew someone who had. The local name for the beast was *gul* – an Arabic





ABOVE: The assembled team (l to r: Dave Archer, Richard Freeman and Chris Clark) contemplate being stuck up the Kafirnigan River without a paddle.

BELOW: Biology teacher Raga Bali, who was awoken one night to witness a *gul* trying to strangle a donkey.

and a curious reconstruction of a family of hominins with Neanderthal-like faces but gorilla-like bodies, down on all fours with bowed legs and ape-like feet.

The next day, we travelled to the north east, leaving civilisation behind and heading for the twin forks of the Romit Valley. The mountains looked nothing like the Alpine peaks of my imagination and more like those of Greece. The region is well watered by rivers and streams, but the earth itself seemed dusty, stony and dry. Nevertheless, the land was highly productive, with mulberries, plums, walnuts, cherries, apples and pears all growing wild, and bears, wolves, lynx, deer, and mountain goats inhabiting the area. Both forks had rivers running along them and small villages dotted along their length, the mountains rising steeply on either side.

Eventually, we reached our first camp area, close to a farm on the lower reaches of the lower fork of the Romit. After breakfast the next day we walked down the valley to the village of Tavish. On the way, we met an old man walking the dusty path beside the Kafirnigan River. We stopped and, through Daldat, asked if he knew of the *gul*. The man said he had never seen one, but he had heard about them. We asked him to describe



the creature to the best of his knowledge. His first words were: "Its thumbs are placed further back on the hand than a human's." This seemed strange, but we were to hear this comment time and time again. The man went on to say that the *gul* was covered in hair, had long arms, a barrel chest and was very muscular, and that several people in the village claimed to have seen it.

VILLAGE WITNESSES

In the village, Daldat asked around and soon several men came forward to tell their stories. The first was a biology teacher called Raga Bali. About seven or eight years ago, he'd been camped some 18 miles (30km) up the valley, where he and some others were cutting grass for livestock fodder. Sleeping in a tent, he'd been awoken by a noise outside. It was about 3am, but the bright moonlight made him think it was morning. He could hear the donkey stamping and braying, and looking out he saw a strange, hairy creature about 23ft (7m) away. It was about 5ft 5in (1.7m) tall and standing in a somewhat stooped position. Its eyes shone in the moonlight and it had a monkey-like face, black hair and long arms. The thumbs were set well back on the hands and the fingernails were black. It looked muscular, but not as massive as a gorilla. It seemed to be trying to strangle the donkey with the rope used to tether it to a tree. The struggling ass broke free and the *gul* ran off. Raga Bali found man-like tracks on the ground where the thing had stood.

We showed him a selection of pictures. These included a gorilla, an orang-utan, reconstructions of *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*, Neanderthal man and

Australopithecus africanus and various illustrations of the yeti, sasquatch and skunk ape. Instantly, he chose Justin Osbourn's excellent cover illustration for Lyle Blackburn's book on the Fouke Monster, *The Beast of Boggy Creek*. The picture shows a dark-haired skunk ape with yellow eyes slouching through a swamp. Raga Bali was particular in saying that the hands were very like those of the creature he saw. He also told us that there was a stone shack further up the river, now abandoned. Years ago, an old man had lived there alone, and during the night something would throw rocks at the roof. The old man had told him it was a *gul*.

A second man, Zai Dim, had an even stranger tale. There are many honey farms along the Romit, where bee-keeping is big business. In 1982, he was driving from a village further up the valley to deliver some hives to Tavish. It was around three in the morning. As he approached a wooded area he saw a hairy animal that he took to be a bear run across the road in front of his car. It disappeared down a slope and into some trees. Zai Dim stopped the car and tried to get a closer look at the creature, but he could not see it. Thinking it had vanished into the trees, he turned to go back to his car.

Suddenly, something grabbed him from behind. Turning around, he was faced by a creature covered in dark yellow hair, with a human-like face, wide cheekbones and slanting yellow eyes. It was clearly female, with drooping, hairless breasts. It slouched, but stood on two legs, and was about five and a half feet (1.7m) tall. As the *gul* grappled with him, he saw that its thumbs were placed far back on the hands and it gripped with its fingers alone. The creature wrestled him to the floor and pinned him down, and he could smell its foul breath. They struggled for some minutes before he got an arm free and punched the creature in the face. It let go of him, and he ran for his car and locked himself inside. The creature retreated into the forest. Zai Dim said he was ill for weeks afterwards – a claim made by several other witnesses, possibly pointing to post traumatic stress.



Interestingly, he felt that the attack had not been motivated by aggression but because the creature had wanted to mate with him. Again, when shown the illustrations and photographs, Zai Dim chose the Fouke Monster as closest to the creature he saw.

The third witness was a man called Gulmond. One morning, when it was still dark, he was walking along the valley about 19 miles (30km) from Tavish, taking food to his parents who were working on a farm. He noticed a figure walking behind him and, suddenly, a hand grabbed his arm. He saw that it was not a human hand but had thumbs placed far back. Turning, he saw a female *gul* covered in dark, camel-coloured hair, with drooping breasts and a foul smell. It tugged at his arm as he tried to pull away, and splashed him with water from the river. As the Sun rose, it ran away. Gulmond, like Zai Dim, felt that the creature's intentions were sexual rather than violent. Like the other two witnesses, he selected the Fouke Monster illustration as being most like the creature he saw.

When we returned to camp we found the owner of the land, a man called She Rali, had returned. He was a park ranger who'd had

several encounters with the *gul* over the past 10 years. At first, he'd had rocks thrown at him by an unknown assailant in his orchard. Then, one morning, he saw an upright, ape-like creature looking up into a walnut tree; it ran away when it saw him. Another time, he saw a female *gul* from only 16 ft (5m) away. The creature seemed to point to his groin before running away. In June of 2017 he got an even closer look. He was re-routing a stream to irrigate his crops when something grabbed him from behind and hugged him, letting go when he turned around and fleeing into the forest. It appeared to be a female *gul* with dark yellow hair, drooping breasts and a vile smell. It had a flat nose with a wide face and cheekbones. Again, the witness emphasised the thumbs being far back on the hands and thought the creature was interested in mating with him. When shown the cards, She Rali picked out a reconstruction of a yeti as closest to what he had seen, but said that the hands were different.

A couple of days later, we visited the village of Sorbu gi Dakana, where we spoke with another witness, Aka Jon, who told us of his experience back in 1978. He had been out harvesting walnuts with friends in the Romit Valley, where they camped. Some time after they had retired, he had looked out of the tent to see a male *gul* crouched and warming itself by the fire. It had long black hair and when it stood up was as tall as a man. Its face was like a man's but broader, and the neck was so short that the head looked as if it sat directly on the creature's shoulders. The *gul*, as in other accounts, smelled bad. When it saw him, it ran away.

Aka Jon had heard that in the next village, back in 1956-57, there was a disabled man who had visited the forest on a regular basis to have sex with a female *gul*. One day he was found dead there. In the 1940s, a friend had taken a shot at a *gul* and missed. Some days later he was found dead in his home, and the locals believed that the creature had killed him in revenge.



TOP: Zai Dim wrestled with what was apparently a female *gul* he believed wanted to mate with him. **ABOVE LEFT:** Trail cameras captured images of a number of animals, including bears, porcupines and the boar seen here – but sadly no mysterious manimals. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A typical stone hut in the Romit Valley.

SON OF THE APEMAN

The next day, assisted by witness Raga Bali, we drove up the valley and found the now abandoned shack he had mentioned at our last meeting. It was a simple stone building of one storey with a slate roof through which tall trees were now growing. Raga Bali told us he had heard a tale about a woman who had lived in a similarly remote house in the Romit Valley. Her husband had passed away and she lived alone. One night, a male *gul* broke into her house and raped her, or so the story went.² She later bore a hybrid son – half *gul*, half human. The boy lived with his mother until her death. He was then taken in by relations in a town called Chuyangaron about 20 miles (32km) away. He was apparently a little slow but otherwise normal and still lived in the town.

I had heard similar human/hominin hybrid stories involving the yeti in the Himalayas, the sasquatch in the US, the *almasty* in Russia and the *didi* in Guyana. Sceptical as I was, I thought it might be worthwhile to try and find the youth. So, a few days later, after some failed attempts to capture anything on film with camera traps and night vision cameras (a split-second glimpse of something hunched, grey and hairy proved to be a false alarm in the shape of a crested porcupine) we broke camp and travelled to Chuyangaron to see if we could locate the man who was supposed to be half *gul*.

All we had to go on was that he lived near a mosque: there were two in Chuyangaron, one old and one new. We asked a young man outside the new mosque if he had heard of the story. He hadn't, but said he could take us to the old mosque, where he asked around and found an old man who was apparently familiar with the tale and invited us in for lunch to tell us what he knew.

It turned out that what we had been told was not strictly accurate. The man in question was not a youth – indeed he was now dead.

His name was Yattin and he had been born in 1956 and had died a couple of years ago, aged 60. Yattin was indeed supposedly half *gul*, and it was known that his mother had been raped by such a creature. He himself was totally normal. He had married and had twins, who unfortunately died, but his wife had later given birth to a daughter who was still alive. The mother having also passed away, the daughter now lived with a female guardian in a suburb of the town. Daldat took down the details and we decided to try and visit her. Of course, three Englishmen couldn't just roll up, bang on the door and ask "Excuse me, but was your father half apeman?", so Daldat suggested he would tell the girl's guardian that we were three of Yattin's old friends, come to pay our respects and meet his daughter.

We arrived at the house and were met by the woman who looked after Yattin's daughter, who was very accommodating and introduced us to the girl. Her name was Moha, and though she could tell us her name she could not tell us how old she was. The guardian said she was 19. Moha looked perfectly normal, thickset with a broad face and bushy eyebrows, but clearly with nothing other than modern human genes. However, she did suffer from some intellectual disability; perhaps this was the origin of the whole hybrid story – a sort of 'changeling' tale, which could have been used to explain

*One night, a male
gul broke into the
woman's house
and raped her*

Moha's condition.

The guardian brought out some old passport photos of Yattin himself. He too was thickset with a broad face, flat nose, a black and white beard, and a thick, Brezhnev-style monobrow. Like his daughter, he was clearly a modern human. We now know that early modern humans did cross-breed with other hominins including Neanderthals, Denisovans and hominins only known from the genetic material they left in modern man. Any hybrid of a human and some kind of hominin would have shown primitive characteristics that neither Yattin or Moha displayed.

DEAD GULS TELL NO TALES

Our next destination was the upper fork of the Romit Valley. We stopped at the first village, Qhyshan. Here, we visited the mosque and spoke to a group of village elders who were very glad to help and shared much information about the *gul*.

We were told of a man named Zanadren who'd had an encounter around 10 to 15 years ago. He had been cutting firewood in the mountains. When he sat down he was attacked by a male *gul*. It forced him to the ground but he was able to hit it with an axe. The *gul* then fled. Sometime around 1990, we were told, two hunters were camping in the mountains. They had built a fire, made camp and were soon asleep. In the night, a female *gul* grabbed one of the men and clutched at his penis. He pulled a burning stick from the fire and drove the creature off.

Another story involved a shepherd who was tending his flock in the mountains when a *gul* appeared and blocked his way. The man struck the creature with a stick and killed it. If there is any truth to this story, the *gul* must have been a very young specimen. A blow from a stick wielded by a human would not kill an adult chimpanzee: apes are strong creatures with thick skulls and a



ABOVE LEFT: Yattin's passport photo shows that he was quite clearly a normal modern human and not the half-man, half-ape hybrid of local legend.

ABOVE RIGHT: Yattin's surviving daughter, Moha, who now lives with her female guardian in the town of Chuyangaron.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY RICHARD FREEMAN

ABOVE LEFT: Kaseem, who said he was chased by a pair of *guls*. ABOVE RIGHT: Honey farmer Asid, whose father's dough was stolen by one of the creatures.

lot of muscle mass, and most hominins from the fossil record seem to share these traits. The body was seen by other villagers and apparently looked like a man, but covered in black and yellow hair.

Another story featured a man who went into the mountains to search for a hunter who had vanished. The man carried a gun for self-defence. One night, as he slept, a *gul* grabbed him and tried to drag him away by the legs. He managed to seize his rifle and shoot the creature dead. The men did not know what happened to either of the bodies in these stories, but they all believed that the *gul* is some form of wild man.

As we drove further up the valley the trees grew sparser and the temperature dropped. On the road we met a man called Abdula who claimed to have seen two *guls*. One he had encountered about six years ago while out hunting with dogs. It was man-like, covered in black hair and had a human-like face with a protruding jaw line. The dogs attacked the creature, which defended itself by throwing rocks. It could run both on all fours and upright like a man, and escaped by running away into the mountains. His second sighting had been just four years ago. He was riding a donkey along the same road we were now on when the animal stopped and would go no further. He saw a creature hiding behind a rock. At first, he thought it was a bear, but then he saw it was a *gul* that looked very similar to the one he had encountered previously, with black hair and a prognathous jaw. It loped off on all fours like a gorilla.

Over the next few days we hiked further up the river valley. We met a honey farmer called Asid, who invited us in for tea. He had not seen a *gul* himself, he said, but his father had. His father had a machine for kneading dough, powered by the flow of the river. A female *gul* would sometimes come around

and steal the dough. His father had told him not to be afraid of her.

On the way back down the valley we took tea with a group of honey farmers. One of them, a young bee keeper called Kaseem, had seen a pair of *guls* a few years ago. He was working with another man in a water-powered mill in one of the streams upriver that led down to the Sardai-Miyona. The mill wheel stopped turning, so Kaseem went upstream to see what had caused the blockage. He discovered two man-like creatures sitting in the stream and blocking the flow of water. They appeared to be a male and a female. The female was human-sized, the male somewhat larger. They had human-like faces, were covered with black hair and gave off a foul smell. As soon as the creatures saw Kaseem they became aggressive and chased him back to the mill. He and the other man locked themselves inside the mill as the creatures banged on the door and leapt up onto the roof. The *guls* prowled around the mill for an hour. The second man, a mullah, who claimed to have seen the creatures before, tried to calm Kaseem down as he was panicking. Eventually, the *guls* gave up and left.

GRAPPLING WITH THE GUL

So what are we to make of the *gul*? Before visiting Tajikistan, I'd thought the creature would most likely be the same putative species as Russia's *almasty*. However, the accounts we collected suggest the two are quite different. The *almasty* could, according to witnesses, reach seven and a half feet (2.3m) tall, while the *gul* was more like an average man in height, if far broader across the shoulders. More telling is the strange structure of the hand. All the witnesses stressed that the thumbs were set further back on the hand than a human's – it was invariably the first thing they mentioned. If

you were going to make up a story about a monster, surely the placement of its thumbs would hardly be top of your list of things to talk about.

The hands of fossil hominins such as *Homo erectus* or *Homo habilis* are much like those of modern man in structure, with a more opposable grip. Even the more primitive Australopithacines, a primitive subfamily of Africa-based hominids that flourished between two to four million years ago, had a hand structure more man-like than ape-like. The shape of the hands of the *gul*, as described by witnesses, is more like those of a chimpanzee or of *Ardipithecus ramidus*, a 4.4-million-year-old hominin twice as ancient as *Homo habilis*. Does this mean that the *gul* is a descendent of *Ardipithecus ramidus* or one of its relations? Possibly, but not necessarily: the strange hand shape may be a relatively recent development, or a plesiomorphic trait; that is, an ancestral feature retained by a modern organism. It could be a feature that allows the creatures to climb with ease, much like the orang-utan with its reduced thumbs and elongated fingers.

All this is just speculation. Only a specimen could answer these riddles; and only then would we know whether the *gul* represents a whole new chapter in hominology or is nothing more than the product of local folklore.

NOTES

1 For more Russian manimal sightings and hunts, see **FT26:6, 45:51-52, 53:22, 54:22-23, 62:8, 67:32-34, 246:46-52, 282:9, 284:13, 308:9**

2 Sexual attacks on humans by apes are not unknown; see the author's letter on the subject on p72 of this issue.

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APOCALYPSE COW!

RETURN OF THE RED HEIFER

Why has the birth of a cow got Jews excited about the potential rebuilding of Jerusalem's Temple and Christian End Timers looking forward to the Last Days? **TED HARRISON** explores the Jewish prophecy of the Red Heifer Without Blemish and its eschatological ramifications.

In the latest twist to an ancient story, veterinary science may now have fulfilled a centuries' old prophecy. One of the many calf embryos implanted into Israeli cows as part of a special breeding programme has finally developed and been born as the legendary red heifer without blemish.

The Temple Institute in Jerusalem, an organisation dedicated to building the Jewish Temple in the city, announced at the beginning of September that the calf (pictured right) had been born. If all goes according to plan, the calf, known in Hebrew as *parah adumah*, will be ritually slaughtered as part of a complex sacrificial ceremony designed to purify the vessels of the new Temple, the third in Jewish history, which the Institute plans to build on the site of the old ones.

It is not the first time that excitement has been generated by news of the birth of a pure red heifer. In recent years there have been several claims to have found the red heifer, but until now the animals have all eventually been disqualified; one was even found to be a bull.

WHISTLING DIXIE

In the spring of 1989, a Pentecostal preacher named Clyde Lott, who is also a Mississippi cattle ranger, was studying his Bible and realised that the long-awaited Second Coming and the fate of humankind depended on the birth of a red heifer. So, he contacted the Director of International Trade for the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce to make an offer to provide Israel with just such a beast. Three months later, the offer landed, via the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, on the desk of the Temple Institute's director, Rabbi Chaim Richman.

After many exchanges of letters and



All animals have been disqualified; one was even found to be a bull

phone calls, Clyde Lott eventually met the rabbi and his colleagues in Jerusalem. While Lott was given a whistle-stop tour of the city's sites and a crash-course in Jewish tradition, he filled the rabbis in on the intricacies of cattle breeding.

In 1994, Rabbi Richman went to Mississippi to examine four likely candidates. One immediately caught his eye. She was called Dixie. "This is the heifer that will change the world," he declared. He sought assurances that she would not be branded, tagged, or used for any work. However, due to laws restricting the importation of live cattle into Israel, the option of importing a live calf from the USA had to be revised.

In 1997, Lott and Richman went into

partnership and a group of West Bank settlers offered land to raise a breeding herd of pregnant Red Angus cows which would be imported from Nebraska. The agreement included the clause that in the event that Lott was 'raptured' during the End Time, Richman and the settlers would assume entire control of the operation.

Eventually, after several years of disappointment and failure to find or breed the right animal, other strategies had to be explored. To get around the difficulties of importing a live animal into Israel, it became necessary for the Temple Institute

to explore the option of importing frozen embryos and implanting them in Israeli domestic cows. This procedure is no longer agricultural science fiction. The Red Angus Association of America, the body that represents Red Angus breeders, confirmed to *FT* the feasibility of such an approach. The international exchange of embryos is now relatively routine and specialist companies have been set up to meet demand. The UK-based Bovine Genetics, for instance, advocates the procedure and says that it is much easier and more ethical to import and export embryos rather than live animals.

The Institute launched a 'Raise a Red Heifer in Israel' programme to raise \$125,000 to finance the breeding of the perfect animal. So far \$40,000 has been raised and embryos from pure-bred Red Angus cattle conceived in the USA have been flown 7,000 miles to select host mothers.

Shipping frozen embryos from Dixie, her descendants and other donor cows, along with select sperm, to be held in safekeeping until after the Tribulation, was part of the deal between Clyde Lott and Rabbi Richman. According to Lott, the agreement, as well as providing the sacrificial heifer, will also ensure good breeding stock for Israelis to raise after the Tribulation during the



LEFT: Rabbi Richman (left) and Clyde Lott with Dixie, the “heiffer that will change the world”, in 1994.

1,000-year-reign of the Messiah – assuming, of course, that the freezers containing embryos and semen survive the cataclysmic events expected.

BEYOND KING SOLOMON’S KEN

Currently, however, all attention is on the newly arrived calf. One week after its birth, the newborn red heifer was certified by a board of rabbis as fulfilling all the biblical requirements for the purification. They will be inspecting the young animal regularly to check that no blemish, not even a single white hair, develops to make the calf unfit for purpose.

The Bible’s Book of Numbers lays down the Jewish purification rites used to ensure anyone or anything is ritually clean, especially after any contact with death. The essential ingredient is “a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke”.

At the age of at least two, and before its third birthday, the unfortunate beast is then taken “outside the camp” and killed in front of the priest, who “shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times”. The carcass is then cremated, “her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn... And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer”.

The cow’s ashes, reduced to a white powder, are burned with the fragrant wood and scarlet wool, and mixed with spring water to produce *mei niddah*, which, once used for purification, enables those entitled to it access to the Temple’s most sacred places.

“Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh... and afterward he shall come into the camp... And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.” The reasoning behind the ritual is a

mystery which, it is said, even King Solomon in all his wisdom could not understand, for it did not follow the pattern of other rituals. To Jewish scholars, the law of the red heifer “was the quintessential *chok*,” explained New York Rabbi Yehoshua Mizrahi; that is, “a law that defies human rationale. We fulfil this *mitzvah*, even though we don’t understand it, because we love God, we trust the Source, and by so doing, we implicitly acknowledge that there are limits to human

understanding”.

Since there have been no Temple cleansing ceremonies for 2,000 years, all Jews today are considered ritually impure. For the Temple to be built and Jewish worship to start there again, everything and everybody involved must be ritually cleansed – in particular, the new generation of priests who are currently being trained to perform the Temple services by studying at the Nezer HaKodesh Institute for Kohanic Studies.

The first priest was Aaron and it was established by Moses that his descendants would serve as the priestly caste through the ages. Today, his descendants are identified by their surname: Cohen, or one of several variations thereof. Modern genetic testing, it has been claimed, shows that 90 per cent of men with the surname share the same genetic markers passed down through the male line from the original priests of the House of Levi.

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

Rebuilding the Temple is an ambitious plan dear to the hearts of many orthodox Jews. The last one, King Herod’s Temple, which had replaced the first one, built by King Solomon, was destroyed by the Romans 2,000 years ago. The Temple Institute wants the new Temple to be the focus once more of Jewish religious practice, where animal sacrifice



LEFT: A scale model of Herod’s Temple on display in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Red cow's birth stirs controversy in the Holy Land

Associated Press

KFAR HASIDIM, Israel—Some say she is a harbinger of the Messiah. Some call for her destruction. Others find the attention she is getting ridiculous.

Ten-month-old Melody, believed to be the first red heifer born in the Holy Land in two millennia, seems happy just lying around in the shade. But the debate over her theological import is one of the more bizarre signs of the growing rupture between religious and secular Israelis.

"The red heifer is one of the most important signs that we are living in a special time," says Gershon Solomon, head of a group dedicated to rebuilding the ancient Jewish Temple, destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

In ancient times, the ashes of a red heifer were mixed with spring water to purify high priests before they entered the Temple. There are fears that some extremist groups might interpret Melody's birth as a sign the time is right to rebuild the Temple on the site that now houses some of the holiest shrines in Islam.



Rabbi Shmariya Shore strokes the red heifer Melody that some believe is a harbinger of the Messiah.

glous groups have not rallied around the cow, some secular Israelis see her as a threat.

"The potential harm from this heifer is far greater than the destructive properties of a terrorist bomb," the liberal Ha'aretz

looking for those signs, and talking seriously about it."

Melody's birth 10 months ago caused a flurry of media interest, coinciding with a religious revival and coming shortly after an election in which religious parties

heifers seem to have died out in Israel since the post-temple period and that it is rare to see a red heifer without white or black spots.

He took pains to point out that Melody, who is a darkish red,

will herald the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah. Some traditions suggest the Messiah will even arrive to supervise the building, others that the Temple must be ready before he arrives. In either case, the coming of the Messiah and the building of the Third Temple are inextricably connected and have been throughout history.

The ancient Jewish text, the *Mishna*, teaches that up until the destruction of the Second Temple, ashes had been prepared from a total of only nine red heifers. The very first was in the time of Moses. The second was slaughtered by the prophet Ezra in the days of the First Temple, and during the entire era of the Second Temple only seven more heifers were used for ashes. This was enough to provide for the nation's needs for purification throughout all those years. In particular, ritual purification was required after contact with death: a person who handled a corpse was considered unclean.

The tenth red heifer might even be prepared by the Messiah himself, the Temple Institute suggests, quoting the celebrated mediæval Jewish scholar Maimonides, citing an ancient tradition: "And the tenth red heifer will be accomplished by the king, the Messiah".

"Does this mean," asks Chaim Richman, "that the appearance of a red heifer in these waning end times is an indication, a forerunner of the appearance of the Messiah himself, who will officiate at its preparation? If there has been no red heifer for the past 2,000 years, perhaps it is because the time was not right; Israel was far from being ready. But now... what could it mean for the times we live in, to have the means for purification so close at hand? With the words of Maimonides in mind, we cannot help but wonder and pray: If there are now red heifers... is ours the era that will need them?"

EXCITING ESCHATOLOGICAL NEWS

The importance of the red heifer is not lost on many fundamentalist Christian

can again take place. Replica Temple vessels and vestments have already been fashioned, ready for the day when they will be needed by the priests. They have been crafted to meet exact biblical specifications and may be viewed at The Holy Temple Visitors' Centre in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. They include smaller items such as a measuring cup, three-pronged fork and silver shovel, plus larger items including the table of the showbread, robes for a high priest and an incense altar. There is even a replica of The Ark of the Covenant, adorned with two cherubim. The real Ark however, says the Institute, is not lost: the far-sighted King Solomon built a hiding place for it under the Temple Mount, where it could be hidden in case of approaching danger. It is where the Levites did indeed hide it and that is where it survives to this day.

Raising a Third Temple is a highly controversial proposal. Jewish archaeologists have calculated that the Holy of Holies was located near where the Dome of the Rock, one of Islam's most holy sites, stands today. The site, known to Jews as Mount Moriah, is where by tradition Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son. It was recaptured by Israel in 1967 during the Six-Day War, but any attempt to evict the current Muslim community from the site would be fraught with political danger. Jews do visit the site, but because of its associations with the Temple, will only go so far. There is a notice at a certain point bearing a warning from the Chief Rabbi that Jews should go no further lest they tread on sacred ground.

There is no love lost between The Temple Institute and the site's current custodians. "They have embarked upon a campaign to destroy the Jewish people's historical and divinely appointed connection to this holy site," says Rabbi Chaim Richman, director of the Institute. "The Israeli government continues to turn a blind eye and pursues

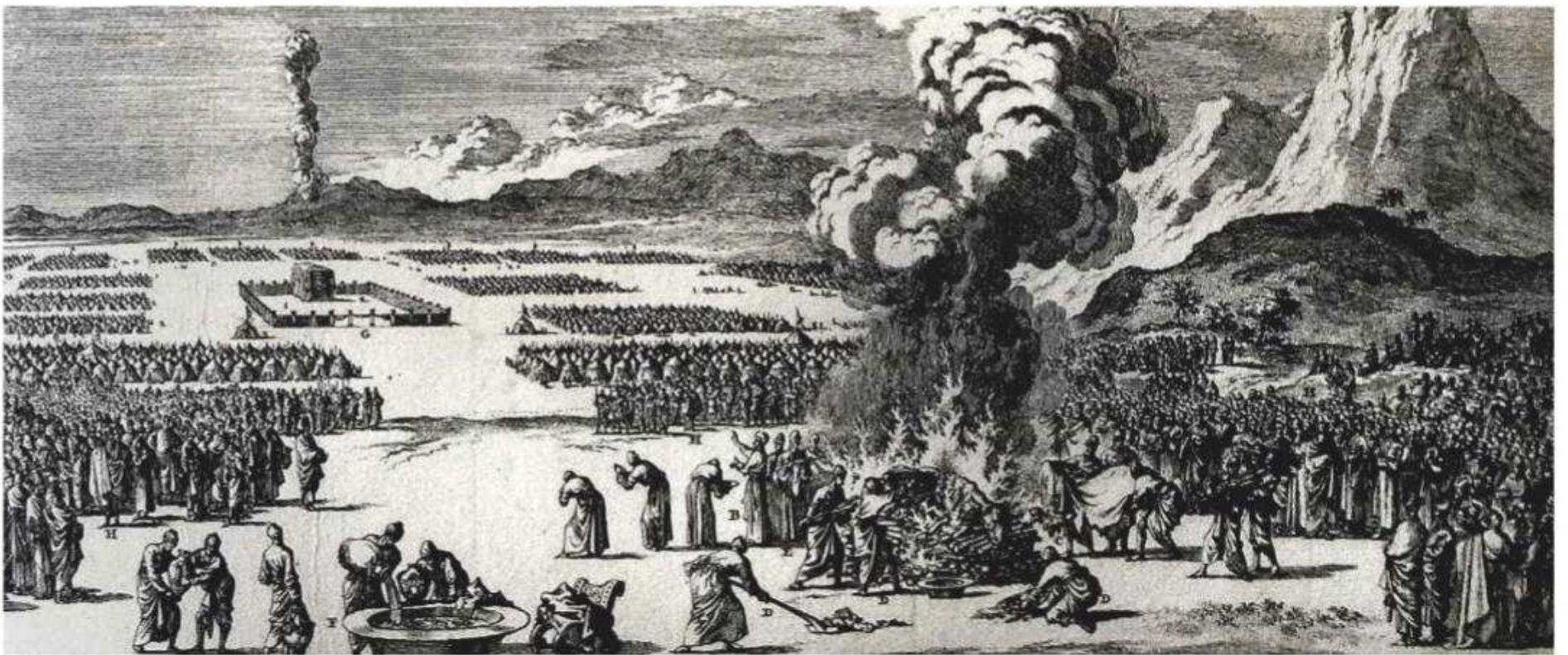
"If there are now red heifers... is ours the era that will need them?"

a policy of tacit acquiescence. Despite the outcry of thousands of Jews who continue to yearn and pray for the rebuilding of the Holy Temple 2,000 years after its destruction, the Israeli government, into whose hands the perpetuity of the Jewish nation and civilisation have been entrusted, actively chooses to do nothing."

Yet there is more at stake than just politics. The rebuilding, many believe,



LEFT: The Temple Institute in Jerusalem, an organisation dedicated to rebuilding the Temple.



ABOVE: The sacrifice of the red heifer shown in a 1683 engraving by Jan Luyken.

groups. Christians, of course, have a shared scripture in the Old Testament, but believe that Jesus was the Messiah foretold in it and that at the end of time He will return again. Many fundamentalists today see events in the Middle East as fulfilments of biblical prophecies, and two of three great events foretold before the Messiah can return have come to pass in modern times. The nation of Israel has been restored and Jerusalem is once more a Jewish city. Only the Temple remains to be rebuilt.

Bethel Communications is a Christian multimedia ministry founded by Deborah Menelaws. She has described the red heifer breeding programme as, eschatologically speaking, “exciting news”.

“We know from the prophet Daniel, whom Jesus quotes, that the Antichrist will set up an office in the Jewish Temple,” says Menelaws. “We also know there is no Temple on the Holy Mount yet... and there are several very important Islamic mosques. To be able to build the Jewish Holy Temple there, another prophecy will have to be fulfilled – namely a peace treaty between Israel and her neighbours and confirmed by the Antichrist. Most of the vessels for the Temple are already made; however, they should be purified with water containing the ashes of a kosher red heifer, which is ritually killed when it’s over two years old.”

The symbolism of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb of God is commonly found in Christian art and literature. The heifer metaphor is less often encountered, but can be found in the Bible in St Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews. He wrote: “If the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” Furthermore, there is evidence of Jesus being linked more specifically to the ninth red heifer. The

Romano-Jewish historian Josephus, writing half a century after the life of Jesus, told this extraordinary story. A red heifer was being prepared for sacrifice as a last-ditch gesture to persuade God to perform a miracle to defeat the Romans, when the creature amazingly and unexpectedly gave birth – to a lamb!

This aberration immediately made the heifer impure and unsuitable, and indeed the Romans came and destroyed the Temple. Christians at the time interpreted the events as a reference to the Christ, the ultimate sacrificial lamb, through whose death humankind was saved.

Both Jewish and Christian fundamentalists read similar symbolism into the sacrifice of the red heifer as representing a purification for sin. The colour red recalls verses from the Book of Isaiah: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they will become white as snow; though they will be red as crimson, they become as white as wool.” The archetypal sin in the Jewish consciousness is the sin of the Golden Calf, of worshipping a false idol. Thus, if one wishes to defeat sin at its root, the penitent must look to the source of the calf, the heifer that bore it.

THE HOLY HEIFER OF HAIFA

The Judæo-Christian interest in the red heifer is not unique. Other cultures have created stories around this genetic rarity. In Greek legend, the 10th labour of Hercules involved stealing the red cattle belonging to the monster Gerylon from the island of Erythia. They were guarded by the monster’s brother, Orthus, a two-headed hound. Getting the red cattle home, however, proved a headache. At one point, a bull escaped and Hercules found it with a herd of cattle belonging to King Eryx, who would return it only if Hercules could beat him in a wrestling contest.

In another Greek myth, Apollo – the god, amongst other things, of cowherds – kept a

herd of sacred red cows, the finest cattle in the world. Hermes, who had the reputation of being the joker amongst the gods, once stole 50 of them. To cut a long story very short, when Apollo heard Hermes play the lyre he let him keep the cattle in exchange for the enchanted musical instrument.

Should they ever come about, the sacrifice of the red heifer and the rebuilding of the Temple will, for many devout Jews, be a spiritual and cultural event of monumental significance, which will, it is said, coincide with the arrival of the Messiah. However, for Christians the significance is even greater. It will be a prelude to the return of Christ, the Messiah, to herald the Apocalypse, the Day of Judgement and the Final Days.

Not surprisingly, the red heifer has sent the End Time bloggers and preachers into overdrive. There can be no doubting the intense emotions generated. In August, 1996, when a red heifer named Melody was born on a farm near Haifa (FT100:15, 102:16, 118:25), a pilgrimage of Orthodox Jews demanded to see the holy heifer of Haifa and Melody had to be kept under armed guard. The news alarmed Muslim groups, and many moderate Israelis became very concerned at the turn of events. One influential writer called for the calf to be shot and every molecule destroyed. “The potential harm from this heifer is far greater than the destructive properties of a regular terrorist bomb,” wrote David Landau. Melody herself defused the situation by growing a white tail.

And if the latest candidate for the role of *parah adumah* and saviour of the Jewish people also starts sprouting hairs of different colours, the end of the world may yet be averted....

♦ **TED HARRISON** is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent. He is a writer, artist, filmmaker and regular contributor to Fortean Times.

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The curse of the crying woman

JAMES RILEY suggests that if you hear a wailing sound outside in the night, you might think twice before opening the door...

Shortly before dawn on Saturday 15 July 2017, Bec Edmonds of Kirkby, Merseyside, awoke to the sound of someone knocking at her front door. Listening again but hearing nothing, she thought it must have been a dream and managed to drift back to sleep. However, when she woke again later that morning Edmonds found that the gate at the rear of her house was wide open. It seemed there *had* been someone at her door and whoever it was had probably approached the house from the street and knocked on the door before walking round to the side of the property and leaving through the back garden.

Posting about the incident on Facebook, Edmonds soon found that many of her neighbours had received similar visits in the early hours of 15 July and most of them had heard more than just knocking. According to the *Liverpool Echo*, residents in and around Burnard Crescent heard “a woman crying through their letterboxes” asking to be let in because she had no money and nowhere to go. Between 3.30am and 5am it seemed that the unidentified woman moved from house to house issuing the same cry for help. One resident told the woman to go to the police but otherwise, no-one engaged with her and no one opened their doors.¹ As *The Independent* reported, the “bizarre wailing” was suspected to be “part of a ploy to burgle people’s homes”. Residents “reportedly fear that if they answer the door, someone will barge in and rob them”.²

This may have been odd behaviour for Burnard Crescent, but wailing women of the night



TOP: A carved tree in Coahuila, Mexico, showing La Llorona and her drowned children.

have long been a fixture of folkloric traditions. Two of the best-known examples are the Irish Banshee (see **FT151:18**) and the Mexican myth of La Llorona, or ‘Weeping Woman’ (see **FT351:30-31**).

As the poet WB Yeats described in *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), “the banshee... is an attendant fairy that follows the old families, and none but them, and wails before a death.” By “old families”, Yeats means that the banshee is something of a familiar associated with ancestral lines that carry deep Irish heritage. Sir Walter Scott made this clear in his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830), in which the “banshie” is described as a “distinction”, a kind of nationally specific, supernatural privilege “only allowed to families of the pure Milesian stock”. Later variants of the myth depict banshees issuing cries as well as knocking at the windows and doors of the family homes with which they are associated.³

By contrast, La Llorona has less to do with specific families and appears in Spanish American myths more as a *genius loci*, associated with riverbanks and lake sides. A nocturnal ghost or

spirit stuck between this world and the afterlife, La Llorona weeps for the children she drowned in an act of revenge against her unfaithful husband. Anyone who encounters her and hears this weeping will experience a similar domestic tragedy. Just as the wail of the banshee foreshadows the keening of mourners yet to come, the cries of La Llorona prefigure those of her unfortunate witnesses.⁴

With their mixture of bad omens, family units and the boundaries of domestic spaces, both myths speak loudly of two fundamental, if not universal anxieties: the desire to protect one’s family and the desire to protect one’s home. In this respect the banshee and La Llorona can be placed alongside other examples of ‘household’ folklore, a continuum that includes stories of the Devil who knocks at the back door and the vampire who waits to be invited over the threshold.

Why are these customs so pervasive? Because although our four walls bring security, privacy and comfort, they invariably make strange anything that comes from *out there*. As generations of mischief-makers know, knocking at the door and running away is one of the oldest scary tricks in the book. It is no surprise, then, that the residents of Kirkby regarded their visitor with such a sense of trepidation.

But beyond these generalities, there remains something very specifically banshee-like about the wailing of the Merseyside woman. Residents were told to take care and not to open their doors if “something like this happens” because the consensus of Burnard Crescent was that the crying woman was not alone. It was not the woman who was seen as the threat, but the concern related to who she might have had with her and who might have “barged in” if a door was opened.⁵ If this was

indeed the case, the woman then acted, like the banshee, as a kind of harbinger. She was a figure who spoke of her own misfortune – her lack of money or a home – and in so doing announced the possibility of this same misfortune befalling those she encountered. The misfortune on this occasion was not death but a suspected attempt at home invasion and robbery: the likely loss of one’s money and domestic security.

If this was a genuine moment of distress, I do hope the woman received the help she needed. That said, shouting through letterboxes in the middle of the night was perhaps not the best way of trying to get it. If, however, skullduggery was afoot, the curiously resonant nature of the ploy probably accounts for its failure. Scams and confidence tricks typically rely on a sense of faith or belief in the veracity of the story told. On this occasion the trick may have caused the banshee to remain outside precisely because we have been taught to believe in (and fear) the things that go bump in the night.

NOTES

¹ ‘Scared residents warning after mystery woman found “crying through letter boxes”’, *Liverpool Echo*, 20 Jul 2017.

² ‘Mystery over woman “crying through people’s letterboxes in early hours of morning”’, *Independent*, 23 Jul 2017

³ WB Yeats (ed.) *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, 1888, p108. Sir Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 1830, p340. For further variants see St John D Seymour and Harry L Neligan, *True Irish Ghost Stories*, 1914, p175.

⁴ For a full account see Ray John De Aragon, *The Legend of La Llorona*, Sunstones Press, 2006.

⁵ *Liverpool Echo*, op cit.

♦ **JAMES RILEY** is Fellow of English Literature at Girton College, University of Cambridge. He is the author of the blog *Residual Noise*.

The Angels of Mons: a soldier's story

November 2018 marks the centenary of the armistice that ended World War I. **DAVID CLARKE** presents a rare account from a British soldier who believed his life was saved by the Angels of Mons.

The historian John Terraine said that the British experience of the First World War entered the world of myth and legend at the opening battle of Mons in August 1914. But did it end there? In many accounts of the war, it was during the battle and subsequent retreat from Mons that St George and his angel warriors appeared to rescue the British forces and halt the German advance (see **FT170:30-38, 319:54-55**). Four years later, when the guns fell silent on the Western Front, few members of the British Expeditionary Force who first saw action in 1914 remained alive and the great outpouring of optimism and faith that followed the 'miracle at Mons' had waned, lost in the misery and attrition of trench warfare. Yet individuals on both sides of the conflict continued to believe that 'God is with us' and some attributed this faith to personal experiences on the battlefield, including two remarkable accounts from the closing months of the war.

In March 1918, the German Chiefs of Staff invoked the warrior angel St Michael as the symbolic protector of their soldiers during their great spring offensive against the Allies. The arrival of 175,000 American troops in France promised to turn the tables and the Germans saw this as their last chance to force the Allies to capitulate. Before fresh American troops could be deployed the Allied



LEFT: The northern French town of Bethune lies in ruins in 1918.

forces were stretched almost to breaking point along the Western Front. From 21 March, thousands of German storm-troopers recaptured miles of territory lost in the bloody battles of 1917. During this perilous period a fresh crop of rumours about supernatural visions began to spread through the Allied lines.

In April, the northern French town of Bethune was almost flattened by an intense German artillery barrage. The attack all but wiped out a detachment of Portuguese soldiers sent to relieve the exhausted British First Army. But according to an account by an intelligence officer, Captain Cecil Wightwick Haywood, the Germans inexplicably failed to follow up their planned advance. Much to his amazement, their shells and machine guns raked a deserted area of open ground. And as British troops prepared for the

The enemy infantry fled as if chased by an invisible army

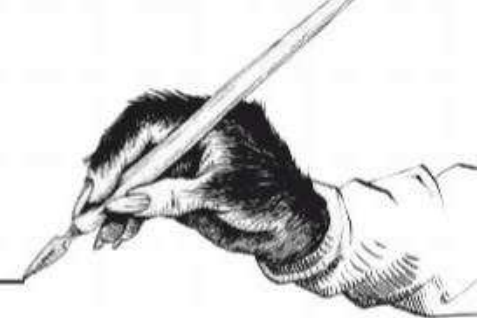
worst, the enemy infantry broke ranks and fled, dropping their guns and equipment as if chased by an invisible army.

When enemy POWs were interrogated they reported firing upon a squadron of phantom cavalry, "clad in white and mounted on white horses" that appeared from the direction of Bethune. They were led by "a fine figure of a man" who rode a great white charger. The description of this figure sounds a lot like the way JRR Tolkien would later imagine the wizard Gandalf the White. By the side of this mounted leader was "a

great sword – not a cavalry sword but similar to that used by the Crusaders".

Soon after the White Cavalry appeared at Bethune the combined Allied forces, reinforced by thousands of fresh American soldiers, pressed forward in a well-planned counter-offensive that pushed the Germans back towards the Hindenburg line. Fighting continued until November, but the German resistance had been broken. Between April and November more than 300,000 prisoners and 6,000 guns were captured.

This is a summary of an account that appears in a pamphlet called *How God Won The War*, published by Captain Haywood in 1935, some 17 years after the events he describes. Haywood was keen to emphasise its truth and included a certified copy of an original French Army order that confirmed "that I



held the rank and position of Intelligence Officer in the 1st British Army Zone on the La Bassée Front (France) in 1918". There is, perhaps unsurprisingly, no mention of the 'true events' at Bethune in the records of the British First Army at The National Archives.

In my book *The Angel of Mons* (2004) I trace the story of the White Cavalry to the British-Israelite movement that was instrumental in spreading the belief that the British Army enjoyed divine protection in both world wars. It was reprinted in a number of pamphlets distributed by Christian groups and was read to "large audiences" in the British Commonwealth. In 1935, as tensions grew in Europe, it was featured in a radio broadcast by the British Israel Prayer League in Canada. Five years later, it reappeared in print following the retreat of the British Expeditionary Force from the beaches at Dunkirk.

I had almost forgotten about Captain Haywood and the White Cavalry when, earlier this year, I received a unique second-hand account of a guardian angel experience from the grandson of a British soldier who fought in Flanders. Remarkably, this account appears to refer to the same spring offensive described by Captain Haywood. This story is told for the first time to mark the centenary of the end of WWI.

Private Leslie Roebuck Kendall was born in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, in 1898 and died in 1989. At 91 he was "very deaf but still with a keen intellect" according to his grandson, William Revels. "He was a grammar schoolboy and in his younger days was a devout Methodist. He never drank or smoked and I remember him as a somewhat taciturn but gentle, kind man with a keen sense of humour". William was around 20 years old when his grandfather described his experience. Private Kendall, an only child, was conscripted in 1917 and went to France to serve in the 19th Durham Light Infantry, 35th Division. At 19 years old he was six feet in height and towered



ABOVE: A postcard showing angelic intervention on the battlefield at Mons, 1914.
BELOW: Private Kendall in October 1919, shortly after his return from Flanders.



above the men from the Bantam battalions.

Private Kendall saw action in late March 1918 when the 35th Division, part of the British 5th Army, were overwhelmed and outnumbered by the German offensive on the Somme. They were forced to retreat a distance of 20 miles in just a few days, westward from Mericourt, northwest of Peronne, to Bray and then to Treux, south of Albert. The retreat took his battalion through a vast cobweb of abandoned German and British trenches that had been at the heart of the Allied campaign in 1916 at the Battle of the Somme. Their journey took around four days and during this time the men had very little time to sleep and eat. Grandson William takes up the story:

The company numbered 80 to start with. They had fought a rear-guard action but were eventually over-run by vast numbers of Germans and had been cut off. There were now just 18 of them and they were trapped in a trench, aware that the enemy were on all sides of them. They were in a desperate position. At this point an angel appeared in the form of a glowing light that hovered just above the trench height. It began to move ahead of them, guiding them through the maze of trenches.

They all saw it, not just the man in the lead, and they walked for many hours, taking a very circuitous route following the light. Although they were aware of lots of German soldiers all around in nearby trenches and above ground, the angelic light led them through trenches that were completely empty and they did not meet a single one. After many hours of travelling in daylight and by night, all 18 of them reached the new British front line and were able to re-join the remains of their battalion.

Records show that Private Kendall's battalion suffered 160 casualties during these few ghastly days. Sixty years after this extraordinary experience Leslie Kendall remained in no doubt the angel he saw was sent to rescue his beleaguered companions. "It was a very precious memory to him which he told me only once," William recalled. Is this a genuine account of divine intervention on the battlefield? Or a memory of a real event distorted by exhaustion, sleep deprivation and belief?

One hundred years after these events the greatest legend of World War I is still alive and continues to generate stories and folklore.

♦ **DR DAVID CLARKE** is the author of *The Angel of Mons* (2004) and *How UFOs Conquered the World* (2016). He lectures in journalism at Sheffield Hallam University and in 2018 launched the Centre for Contemporary Legend: <https://centreforcontemporarylegend.wordpress.com/>

Spirit foxes and magic weasels

CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE
explores the marvellous
taxonomies of Chinese
folklore (or is that
Foucauldian fakelore?)

Fans of the highly influential philosopher, historian of ideas and S&M enthusiast Michel Foucault may well be familiar with an eccentric method of classifying different types of animals.

In the preface to his *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Foucault cites a passage from a “certain Chinese encyclopædia”. Instead of classes (mammals, birds, reptiles) or orders (primates, rodents, carnivores), this supposed Chinese reference work classifies animals according to the following schema:

(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.¹

Although this is presented as an extract from a genuine text, it is now generally accepted to have been fabricated by the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, who featured it in a short essay, “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins”.²

Whilst discussing the problems faced by Wilkins in his attempts to create a universal language in which each word would define itself, and the necessity to classify the Universe into 40 categories, each one subdivided by differences and subdivided again by species,³ Borges prefaces the animal classification quote as follows: “These ambiguities, redundancies

and deficiencies recall those attributed by Dr Franz Kuhn to a certain Chinese encyclopædia entitled *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*”.⁴

The mischievous Borges gives some credence to his invention by mentioning Franz Kuhn (1884-1961), a German scholar who definitely did exist, the translator of numerous Chinese works.

Borges’s cleverness lies not only in citing the genuine figure of Kuhn, but that the eccentric classification of animals of his *Celestial Emporium* is not dissimilar to that which appears in some recorded Chinese folklore.

“On the Cult of the Four Sacred Animals (*Szu Ta Men* in the Neighbourhood of Peking” by Lei Wei-Tsu⁵ is a study of traditional Chinese beliefs regarding sacred or supernatural animals; *szu ta-men* means, literally, “The Four Great Families.” The four are foxes, weasels, snakes and hedgehogs; a

variant tradition had five (adding, for example, hares, tigers, wolves or turtles), but foxes and weasels are always ranked first and second.

Individual animals belonging to each of these four groups may simply be ordinary animals – as profane creatures, it is therefore permissible to hunt or otherwise kill them; the sacred ones, however, are taboo. The difficulty is in recognising those that have made the transition to sacredness.

In this article, Wei-Tsu analyses these spirit-animals, and the particular terms and honorific titles that must be used when addressing them. He

describes the characteristics of each animal-spirit, their places of residence and their daily lives, and explains their place in rural life, how they manifest in the lives of Chinese Muslims and Christians, and details the different types of professional magicians who work with these spirits, their practices, ceremonies and rituals. All these aspects are subject to categorisation, with their own particular nomenclature. The complexity and detail of these categories is reminiscent of Borges’s *Celestial Emporium* animal classification, albeit with more logic and structure.

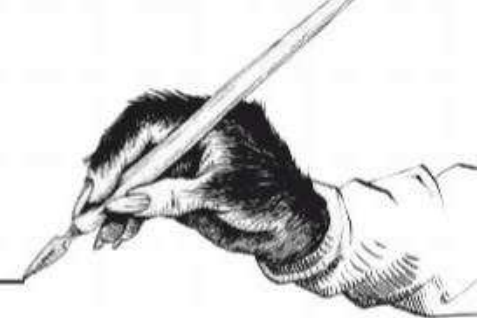
Beginning with the Fox family (*hu-men*), the profane fox is apparently “very timid and never approaches people” whereas a sacred fox “does not pay any attention to people but trots about without fear and shyness.” (Anyone who lives in London or other British cities will have encountered several foxes

*A sacred fox
“trots about
without fear
and shyness”*



LEFT: A sacred weasel, if approached by humans, will assume a squatting position and raise its forepaws menacingly.

MELANIE OLDS / USFWS



behaving like this).

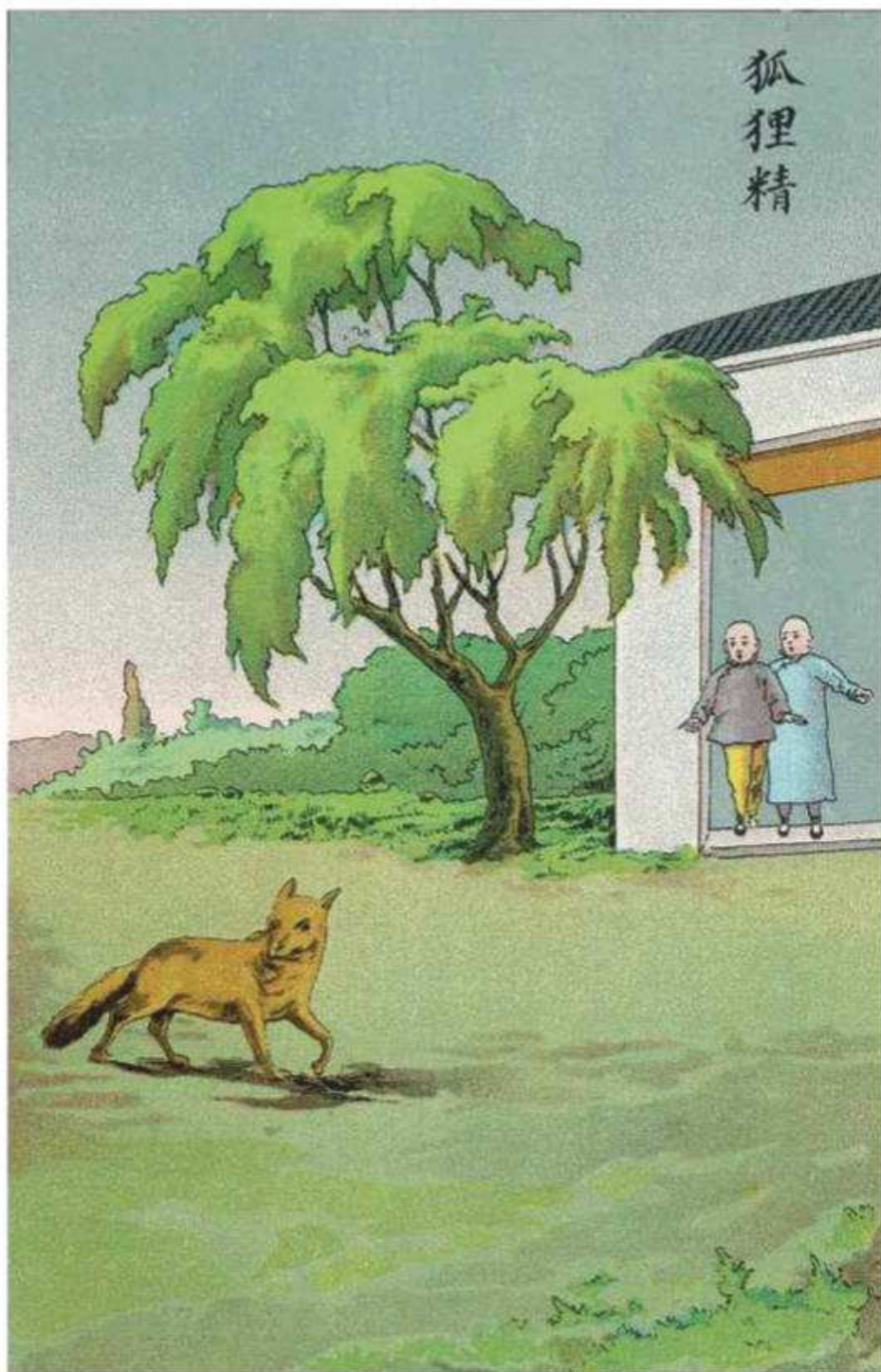
The *huang-men* or Weasel family: a profane weasel is “very easily frightened and hardly dares to make an appearance by day,” whereas their sacred counterparts are notable for their red eyes and fearlessness. If approached by humans, the sacred weasel simply adopts a squatting position and raises its fore-paws menacingly. One may think of certain *kung fu* animal styles.

Of the Hedgehog family, *pai-men*, it is said that the sacred hedgehogs again may be recognised by their red eyes and white hair, with the tip of each bristle resembling a pearl. Again, like the sacred fox and weasel, it may be distinguished from its profane brethren by its “strolling around” with boldness and ease.⁶

Lastly, the Snake family (*liu-men* or *ch’ang-men*): the sacred snake has an interesting ability or special power, being able to “alter its size and shape spontaneously. For instance, a snake five or six inches long and as thin as a chopstick may at once reach the length of 40 feet.” This seems an unequivocal characteristic by which to identify them, but, in case of doubt, “snakes with a *kuan-tzu*, that is a flesh crest on their heads, are usually regarded as sacred”. In addition, sacred snakes may often be observed coiled up with their heads raised, a posture known as *ta-tso*, “to sit in meditation as Buddhist do”.⁷

It can be advantageous to have one of these sacred animals living on one’s farm; they may protect the farmer and his family from harm and ensure prosperity. In these instances, the honorific title *Ts’ai-shen Yeh* (God of Wealth) is bestowed on the animal. In this respect, there is a similarity with Roman household gods – *lares* and *penates* – and with Celtic myths of house-fairies, such as brownies, hobs and phynnodderees (see FT330:58-59, 340:52-53).

T’an-hsien refers to sacred animals when they are worshipped in a temple, and *chia-hsien* when worshipped in a private farmhouse. Interestingly, Wei-Tsu (whose article is written in English) translates *hsien* as



ABOVE: In this illustration from 1912, a Chinese demon has taken the form of a fox, but perceptive peasants know it for what it really is...

‘genius’ or ‘fairy.’ *Hsien* (Pinyin = *xian*) is one of two honorifics used for the sacred animals, the other being *yeh*, (old man). Thus, a respectful way of speaking about a fox is to say *Hu-yeh*, or *Huang-yeh* for a weasel.

The precision and complexity with which the various types of spirit-animals are classified, as evinced in Wei-Tsu’s article, is paralleled in a recent study by Xiaofei Kang, *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China*.⁸ Here, Kang identifies various types of supernatural fox, broadly known as *hu-xian*.⁹ There are *hu-shen* (fox deities) and *hu-wang* (fox kings), but also *hu-mei* (fox demons), *hu-yao* (fox spectres)

and *hu-guai* or *hugui* (fox sorcerers). To simplify matters, fox spirits, when speaking of themselves, simply use *hu*.¹⁰

People spoke respectfully of foxes as *shang-xian* (the heavenly *xian*), *xian-jia* (the honourable *xian*) or *da-xian* (the great *xian*). Curiously, however, *xian* is also employed to describe young, beautiful women – originally, divine maidens, but by the time of the Tang dynasty, *xian* is used to refer to sexually active Taoist nuns, as well as courtesans.

Foucault cites Borges’s imaginary Chinese animal classification in his preface as inspirational, explaining that the conception for his *The Order of Things* “first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of

the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – *our* thought” – *in other words*, Western Enlightenment rationalism. He goes on to argue that this fantastical classification system, albeit fictive, shows us, in a charming manner, that there exists “another system of thought” and further, demonstrates “the limitation of our own [system of thought], the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.”¹¹

It is, perhaps, an aspiration of fortune to be confronted with the ‘impossible,’ such that it encourages us to conceive of other worlds, possibilities, and systems of thought.

NOTES

1 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York: Pantheon, 1970, xv.

2 Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1975, pp101-105.

3 Each class had a two-letter monosyllable associated with it, each difference would have its own consonant, and each species a vowel. Borges gives the example of the class for ‘element’, *de*, with *b*, signifying ‘fire’ being added, thus *deb*, then with the further addition of the letter *a* denoting a portion, *deba* becomes the word for ‘flame’ in Wilkins’ universal language.

4 Borges, op. cit., p103.

5 *Folklore Studies*, Vol. 7 (1948), pp1-94.

6 *On the Cult of the Four Sacred Animals*, Li Wei-Tsu, p1.

7 *Ibid.*, p2.

8 New York, Columbia University Press, 2005.

9 *Xian* (or *hsien*) has several connotations. The word itself originally denoted ideas of spiritual immortality but may also be used to refer to a physically immortal being, an alchemist, magician, or sage; or, as we have already seen, a fairy, genie, or elf.

10 For an article on Japanese fox spirits, see Trevor Ouellete, “Fox Tales”, FT214, 30-37.

11 Foucault, op. cit, xv.

◆ CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE is a regular contributor to FT and the author of *Gef! The Strange Tale of an Extra-Special Mongoose* (Strange Attractor Press, 2017).

THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

39. MAKING LIGHT OF THE EARTH

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Is it a UFO? No, it's an earth light. Or at least it might be. It all depends on what you mean by 'UFO': earth lights *look* like UFOs, be they shiny and metallic or less definable odd blobs of light in the night sky, whereas not all UFOs, whatever they may be, are earth lights. To distinguish one from the other, one has to look deep down into the Earth, not over to Area 51, or up to the heavens. Speaking of which, and just to confuse the issue, some earth lights have been taken to be signs of divine recognition, perhaps even approval. It is all a nice tangle, and pleasurably fortean in that half a century after they were first mooted, no one really knows what earth lights are. But how it was established that they're not spacecraft, or 'UFOs' in any other conventional sense, makes a fascinating tale in itself.

Earth Lights Revelation followed seven years after Paul Devereux's initial foray into the subject, *Earth Lights* (1982), in which the author now says he was "just feeling his way". But even then, a few observant observers had already noticed a correlation between clusters of UFO sightings and fault lines in the Earth's crust. In 1968, Ferdinand Lagarde published – in *Flying Saucer Review* – the results of his analysis of the 1954 French UFO wave, in which he discovered that some 40 per cent of those sightings were associated with fault lines. The following year John Michell, in *The View Over Atlantis*, endorsed the idea: "There is no doubt that... phantom lights are manifestations of electro-magnetic energy most commonly encountered in the neighbourhood of geological faults, during episodes of magnetic disturbance." In 1977, Michael Persinger and Gyslaine Lafrenière published *Space-Time Transients and Unusual Events*, which presented what became known as the Tectonic Strain Theory: in essence this proposes that, in the right circumstances, rocks grinding together under seismic pressure produce light effects, which they put down to piezo-electricity. Things have proved to be less simple than that, as Devereux shows, but Persinger and Lafrenière at least offered a plausible mechanism that would explain some UFO events, and found support in various quarters. Devereux, with assistance from David Clarke and Andy Roberts (surely but sprogllets at the time, albeit dedicated ones) and geochemist Paul McCartney – who, we hope, is unrelated to that beknighted, sinistral vegetarian from Liverpool – sets out to establish powerful correlations

between faulting in the Earth and anomalous lights. In this he succeeds, and the correlations strongly suggest a deep underlying cause.

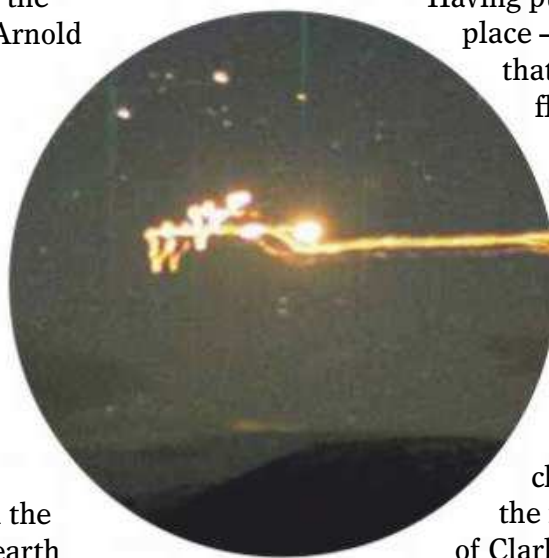
Not that the argument is always closed to question. Devereux kicks off his case by re-examining the somewhat well-worn kick-starter-in-chief of modern ufology, the Kenneth Arnold sighting of 1947. His line of reasoning is detailed, lucid and *prima facie* plausible. The Cascade Mountains are heavily faulted, and the behaviour of whatever Arnold saw accords with what's known of earth light appearances. Problems arise when one puts Messrs Kottmeyer and Easton's scarcely less credible suggestions, that the objects were either geese or pelicans, into the mix. That's without asking whether or not it's possible for stress in the Earth's crust to power 'earth lights' at 9,000ft (2,743m) above sea level. Granted, Devereux was writing long before the goose/pelican proposal arose, but that question of energy and altitude still niggles, and the book doesn't really get to grips with it.

Devereux finds himself inevitably stuck with the problem of UFOs. As he says: "Just as earth lights began to be separated out from the camouflage of possibly related but somewhat different light phenomena, they became swallowed up by that voracious and ill-disciplined monster, the UFO." Not that everyone made the conflation: we're treated to a wonderfully

droll scene from the 1983 BUFORA conference where Stan Friedman – for it was he – "energetically criticised" Devereux's presentation on earth lights, seemingly nervous that they would compromise his dedicated promulgation of UFOs as actual, solid ET craft. Odd, as Friedman's favourite 'nuts and bolts' UFO amounts to a certain bunch of broken balsa sticks and tattered fabric scraped up from a New Mexico pasture. At least that's not an earthlight! The "voracious and ill-disciplined monster" nonetheless inspires Devereux to one of the pithiest summaries you'll find anywhere of the social and psychological reasons why Arnold's really rather unremarkable sighting (by later ufological standards) was fastened upon in 1947 as something passing strange and was bound ere long to become, in the public perception, something extra-terrestrial. Arnold himself came to prefer the notion of sky-dwelling animals, an idea that still has, er, legs in some quarters.

Having put the UFO in its place – and we should note that any passing aircraft, flock of birds, bright planet, signal light or even insect may be *reported* as a UFO – the book embarks on a massive, but inevitably partial, 104-page international survey of mysterious lights, a chunk of which includes the results, up to that time, of Clarke and Roberts' 'Project

Pennine'. The section more than adequately establishes that some oddly-behaving lights can be distinguished from other members of the Earth's light-based minstrel show such as will-o-the-wisps, ball lightning, and earthquake lights. Some are transient – by which we mean appearing for short periods of days, weeks or months in a given location before disappearing from human ken – but a striking proportion have been seen from time to time, or even regularly, in much the same place, over decades. In some places the lights garnered nicknames. In many cases, they have been seen with such regularity



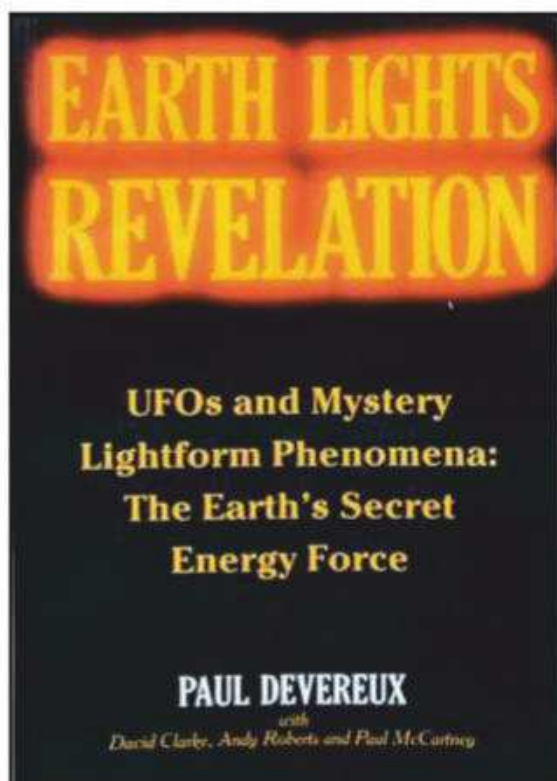
that the unenquiring locals take them for granted.

The real heart of the book is its last section, 'A Closer Look'. It's a bit late to say so, but *Earth Lights Revelation* might have been better structured, and its argument more immediately accessible, had this all been integrated into the international survey, relating the accounts and experiences of earth lights with the geophysical features that underlie them, and reinforcing the overall case. For that is what this section essentially does, focusing on three particular areas of earth light activity: Hessdalen, Norway – which was impressively instrumented – in the 1980s; the 'Barmouth lights' of the Welsh Revival, 1904–5; and the Yakima Reservation lights of the early 1970s.

The light phenomena in the Hessdalen valley, some occasionally but intermittently captured on radar, were at their peak between 1982 and 1984. There were correlations with seismic activity that the local investigators initially failed to spot (Devereux put them right). Since then strange lights have been reported and photographed but (this is not in the book) give every impression of being anomalous only in the minds of their promoters, who seem to have developed a vested interest in maintaining the 'weirdness' of Hessdalen. Which is not, of course, to deny the genuineness of the original flurry of phenomena.

The events around Barmouth seemed to be centred on the Protestant revivalist mission of Mary Jones, who was part of a major revival in North Wales. Her base was Egryn chapel, a few miles north of the town, and not unnaturally the lights were taken locally as a sign of divine support of her preaching and the revivalist cause. Lights were seen as far north as Llanfair, just south of Harlech, where stood another tiny isolated chapel. The revival faded away in 1905, and so, apparently, did the lights. Devereux acquired the geological survey for the Barmouth–Harlech area, and found that the road between the two towns is entwined around or runs parallel to the Mochras Fault – “a deep-rooted (1995ft/610m) downthrow... Most of the geographically positionable light events were strung out along it like beads on a thread.” Field surveys revealed that the majority of the lights occurred within 100 metres (330ft) of the Mochras Fault. So it would seem that Mary Jones's preaching and a wriggle or two in the Earth's crust fortuitously coincided, with remarkable results. Of course, one can't prove that the Good Lord didn't have a seismic hand in events. A revival of the lights, which is bound to happen sooner or later, might favour the secular argument – unless, of course, there's another outbreak of religious enthusiasm at the same time.

The anomalous lights seen in the Yakima Indian reservation in Washington State flourished between 1972 and 1978, and were mainly reported by fire control



“A MIND NEEDS
BOOKS AS A
SWORD NEEDS
A WHETSTONE,
IF IT IS TO KEEP
ITS EDGE.”

George RR Martin

lookouts who, for once, might reliably be called trained observers. Here again, luminous phenomena clustered around fault lines. The lights were generally red–orange or yellow–orange, and tended to appear over a certain area; never, says Devereux, more than two at a time. On occasion the glow they cast was directional, visible from one side but not from the opposite side. Most were blobs, but many other shapes, as well as columns and flares of light, were reported. Most were seen at night. Some effects associated with the lights were straight from the ufological textbook: lights would pursue cars, whose headlights and engines would fail; on a couple of occasions the entire reservation's two-way radio system shut down inexplicably.

But some effects were really bizarre: “Fire lookouts claim to have heard voices calling in inexplicable circumstances, a woman screaming, someone ‘hollering’. There were strong, repulsive odours. And the secretary of a wildlife biologist... frequently heard the gravel outside [her home] crunching as if being walked on – but there would never be anyone around to make the sound. Bill Vogel [the chief fire control officer] also heard the crunching gravel sound at the location.” It is, of course, difficult to be sure that such events were related to the light

phenomena and the seismic activity that underlay them, or were weird experiences of a more subjective ‘paranormal’ nature, merely coincidental with lights appearing. Perhaps the strangest impression many fire-watchers had was that the lights were somehow conscious of them. Devereux has, controversially, suggested that earth lights do on occasion exhibit consciousness and do interact in various ways with those watching them. This is perhaps the moment to introduce Greg Long, whose book should, if possible, be read alongside Devereux's.

His *Examining the Earthlight Theory* gives a detailed account of the Yakima sightings and, no less valuable, a thorough account of Michael Persinger's Tectonic Strain Theory (TST). (We should point out that the book is now rare, and consequently expensive: Amazon UK gives prices ranging from £75 to £350, up a bit, what? from the original \$17.95.) Here's a selection from his account of Persinger's take on human/earth light interactions:

“Depending upon the geometry of the fault and the dynamics of the local stress-field at the fault-line, the luminosity could make a sudden right-angle turn, or quick or slow movements or sudden diving motions. The surprised witness would say the luminosity was under intelligent control and performing impossible feats... A human witness is a charged semi-conductor... If the witness approached the magnetic field column, [it] would move away as the viewer approached, seemingly mimicking the witness's motions. The witness would report that the object was eluding him... As the values of the stress lessened or increased, the field potential values of the column would vary. The luminosity would flash or blink... ‘They started signalling us!’” Persinger, *via* Long, also explains that the closer one is to a ‘luminosity’, the odder the effects on a person: ranging from odd smells and dream-like states to hallucinations or periods of ‘missing time’.

Long has justified criticisms of the TST. We would quibble with some of Devereux's hypotheses regarding earth lights and quantum mechanics. Nobody understands quantum theory, it can't be said often enough, and even honest peddlers of the paranormal should leave it well alone. Devereux updated earth lights research nearly 10 years later in his and Peter Brookesmith's *UFOs and Ufology* (Blandford, 1998). What we do know is that the Earth generates strange luminosities. No one quite knows how. Research continues. Devereux and Long wrote pioneering works on the subject that belong in any decent forteen library. That's more than most of us can claim to have done.

Paul Devereux, *Earth Lights Revelation*, Blandford, 1989

Greg Long, *Testing the Earthlight Theory*, Center for UFO Studies, 1990

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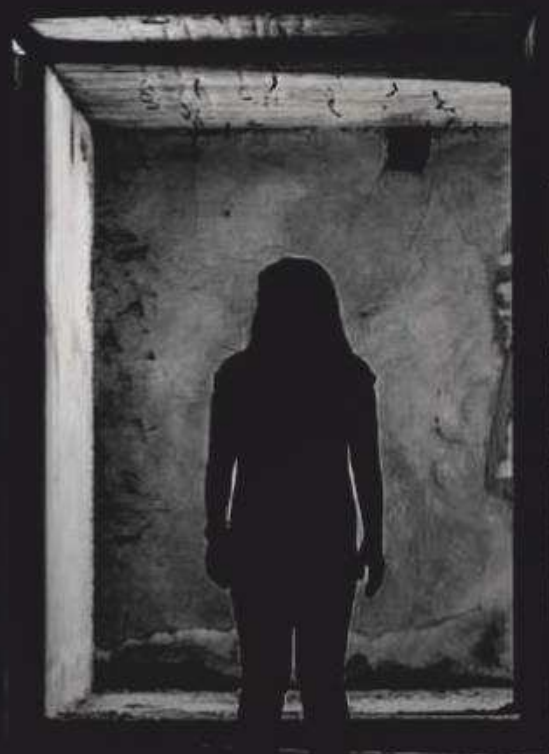
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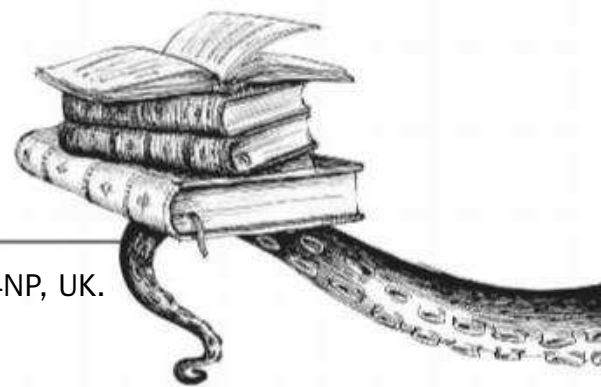
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When sceptics are critical friends...

An investigation into ghost hunting by a genuinely interested sceptic emphasises the critical need (which believers should heed) for robust scientific methodology and the application of logic

Investigating Ghosts

The Scientific Search for Spirits

Benjamin Radford

Rhombus Books 2017

Pb, 321pp, illus, \$19.95, ISBN 9780936455167

Sceptical books on the paranormal are an acquired taste (often a bad one). Good sceptical books are a rarity, especially those seriously discussing ghosts. Thus, when one does come along it deserves attention, particularly when written by the deputy editor of the *Skeptical Enquirer*. Benjamin Radford holds a degree in psychology and education, and has previously written or contributed to some 20 other books, including *Scientific Paranormal Investigation: How to Solve Unexplained Mysteries*.

This book aims not to indoctrinate but rather to raise critical questions about how ghost hunting is typically pursued, especially on popular TV shows. It ought to be read by people seeking to emulate these broadcasts, especially those already convinced ghosts are spirits. If that were known for sure, there would be little point in investigating. Unlike many armchair critics, Radford is genuinely curious about the subject and has actually joined in some of these breathless affairs. He presents a sober case for assessing evidence, the application of logic and the need for scientific methodology. Not surprisingly, he all too often finds them sorely lacking. In his view, we have no scientific evidence for spirits haunting buildings and we never will the way most ghost hunters are currently going about things, certainly via the gadget and gimmick-loaded methods depicted in many popular

efforts to capture phantoms. He advances a number of important criticisms to be taken on board by many who, whether falsely, negligently or innocently, label themselves as 'scientific' in their endeavours.

Much of the 'gear and equipment' typically deployed in the 21st century when looking for ghosts is rightly questioned or found to be worthless. There are critiques of alleged EVP recordings and the photographic and video evidence presented as proof for ghosts, together with discussion of common sources of errors. Chapter 4 details a set of important principles researchers should apply, such as always going to original sources. Radford doesn't ridicule those he considers in error, but one can sense his frustration with the futile repetition of errors and dead-ends, and ghost hunting without reference to scientific standards.

Psychological and social approaches and so-called 'legend-tripping' are also mentioned, along with cases and locations he has personally considered, focusing on haunted sites in that most fortean of US States, New Mexico (the appeal of which I can well understand). He provides an exemplary report on his own investigation of alleged hauntings around Fort George, Niagara, and his fruitless efforts to verify folklore concerning an alleged presence, 'Sarah Ann'.

He is refreshingly undogmatic, comparable in tone to the late Carl Sagan or to Stephen Jay Gould, a welcome change from the mocking polemics of many professional and amateur sceptics. This is a result of actually taking the scientific method seriously.

Unfortunately, whenever

"Ghost hunters need to acquaint themselves with the standards this book champions"

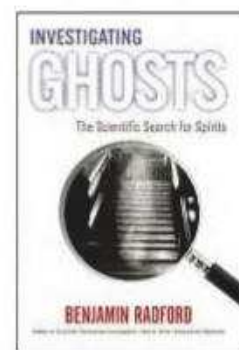
one risks setting exacting standards for other people, one may not reach these oneself. Whilst rightly wanting to inject more science into the field, he makes little acknowledgement of scientific work already undertaken by psychical researchers. This is the major limitation of the book, drawing upon so many sceptical sources, some good but others highly partial and downright erroneous. Consequently, many of what are presented as novel sceptical explanations and approaches reproduce conclusions actually reached by psychical researchers before 1900, such as fallibility of witness testimony, problems with single uncorroborated anecdotes, the unconvincing nature of spirit photographs and so on.

Discussing sound recordings, one might have expected mention of, for example, *The Mediumship of the Tape Recorder* (1978) by David Ellis and more recently *Paracoustics: Sound the Paranormal* (2015), edited by Steven Parsons and Callum Cooper, for a proper overview. Fraudulent mediums are mentioned, but none of the genuine enigmas surrounding DD Home and Mrs Piper. Case collection approaches to research since *Phantasms of the Living* (1886) and the *Census*

of *Hallucinations* (1894) are eschewed. Sceptical treatment of poltergeists is woefully scant (but then has been since the last and only serious one, by Frank Podmore in 1896), although there is a positive citation of a chapter in *Parapsychology: A Handbook for the 21st Century* (2015). In particular, the Enfield poltergeist is avoided as "too complex to go into here" and "widely acknowledged as a hoax". Why, and on whose evidence? Here Radford has failed to seek out any original sources; the Enfield problem is actually the surfeit of evidence. To be fair, mention of the case is amid reference to the lying film *The Conjuring 2*, but mixing the two is rather like trying to seriously discuss palaeontology after only watching *One Million Years BC* or *Jurassic Park*. These are sins of omission; needless to say many ghost hunters urgently need to

acquaint themselves with this same literature and standards that this book champions. I could go on, but that would be to detract from Radford's positive achievements. As the author recognises, science is a work-in-

progress, so hopefully a future edition might provide necessary expansion. I am not expecting sceptics on the paranormal to agree, but engagement with research beyond the level of the cable and satellite channels is crucial. There are many scientific aspects of ghost experiences awaiting proper examination, such as pharmaceutical approaches stressing drug-induced sensations, neurological and physiological reactions in



Continued on p58

Aliens, in his own words

Calvin Parker, who claims to have been abducted by claw-handed aliens, tells the story of an event that traumatised him 45 years ago

Pascagoula – The Closest Encounter

My Story

Calvin Parker

Flying Disk Press 2018

Pb, 409pp, illus, £20.00, ISBN 9781982995843

The Pascagoula incident helped bring about the acceptance of ufological concepts such as ‘missing time,’ ‘alien examinations,’ ‘screen memories’ and ‘post alien syndrome.’ From the start it was regarded as an important case because it involved two witnesses who were interviewed by the local sheriff’s office only hours after the event. The 42-year-old Charles Hickson and 19-year-old Calvin Parker stuck to their story and both were traumatised by the encounter.

The Sheriff’s Department ruled out the possibility of a hoax because after being interviewed separately, the men were left in a room where they were secretly recorded. It was evident they were startled by seeing or experiencing something very unusual.

Only a month afterwards, in November 1973, *UFO Investigator* magazine suggested four possible explanations for their encounter with three floating mummy-like entities, which grabbed them and took them inside their craft for an examination by an eye-like scanning device. Either it was a real event; the witnesses were lying; they were the victims of a hoax; or they experienced a rare form of hallucination or vivid dream. Prominent writers including Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman regarded it as a dream, and John Keel went for the hallucination option. Joe Nickell in the *Skeptical Inquirer* (May/June 2012)

thinks they might have entered a hypnagogic state which triggered their abduction fantasy and was accompanied by sleep paralysis.

This ‘fantasy’ could well have been ‘borrowed’ from books such as *UFOs Over the Americas* (1968), by Jim and Coral Lorenzen. Bad movie buff Martin Kottmeyer notes the book contains the story of CAV who encountered in Peru mummy-like aliens with claw-like hands which glided along the ground. The chapter about them is entitled ‘The Flesh Crawlers,’ which is recalled in Hickson’s statement that “My flesh crawls when I think about those three things that appeared through the opening [of the craft]”.

Elsewhere in the book a fish-shaped UFO, an examination by an eye-like device, the Hills’ medical examination, and the shock induced by UFOs are discussed.

Steve Sessions [FT119:38-43] also notes the claw-handed aliens are reminiscent of the mutant beings in ‘This Island Earth’, and that the night before the abduction, ABC television’s ‘Movie of the Week’ was *Don’t Be Afraid of the Dark*, a thriller about creatures abducting a housewife.

Charles Hickson with co-author William Mendez gave his side of the story in *UFO Contact at Pascagoula* way



back in 1983 (reprinted by Flying Disk Press in 2017, and reviewed in FT365:60). Now Calvin has finally decided to write this book to get the real story out there.

The strong point about the book is that it tells us much about Parker’s life in his own words and it has transcriptions of the ‘secret’ tape recoding, diagrams, handwritten notes, photographs and numerous magazine and press clippings.

To avoid media attention, he previously claimed he fainted when the UFO appeared, but here he tells of seeing the three grey wrinkled-skin creatures floating towards them. One of them grabbed him with its crab-like hands and injected him with something that made him feel relaxed and weightless. Inside the craft, a small entity with big brown eyes telepathically told him not to be afraid and he was inspected by a couple of alien devices. Then he was returned to where he was originally captured by one of the faceless creatures.

Another highlight of the book is the transcript of a hypnotic regression session Budd Hopkins conducted with Calvin on 14 March 1993. This took him back to the night of the encounter, where he recalls an entity inside the craft cutting his hand and injecting him. He hated this ‘female’ being as she caused him to have a burning pain and pumped out all his blood. Reading her thoughts, he thought she wanted to kill him.

How much this regression session, the passing of time and Hickson’s repeated telling of the story has influenced his recollection is hard to tell. Whatever happened, this book does show how the incident changed his life and still has an impact on him 45 years later.

Nigel Watson

★★★★★

Continued from p57

witnesses and possible studies on the reactions of animals. Radford states: “Serious paranormal investigators should seek sceptical and scientific researchers as allies, not opponents”. He is right; one can only hope such approaches will actually be reciprocated.

Alan Murdie

★★★★★

Wacky and Wonderful Misconceptions About Our Universe

Geoffrey Kirby

Springer 2018

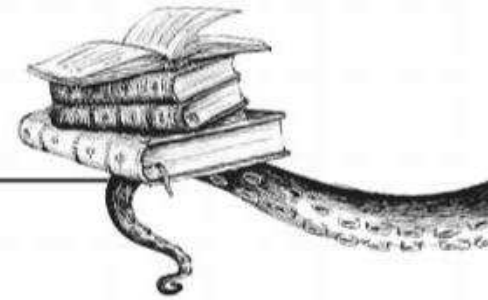
Pb, 258pp, illus, references, index, £19.50, ISBN 783319730219



This book could have been called ‘Space Oddities’ if that title hadn’t already been used in SD Tucker’s thought-provoking book [FT360:62]. There’s

common ground between the two, with Tucker’s book frequently cited as a reference in this one. There’s the Flat Earth and the Hollow Earth, flying saucer contactees and the Ætherius society, Martian canals and the Face on Mars, Charles Fourier’s theory of planetary sex and Hans Hörbiger’s world-ice theory. Yet the two books are different in style, and clearly aimed at different audiences. If you want a detailed analysis of these wacky ideas in their historical context, then Tucker is the one to go for. If you’re looking for a relaxing read that never spends too long on one subject, accompanied by hundreds of illustrations (many in colour), then Geoffrey Kirby’s may be more to your taste.

While Tucker’s perspective is essentially that of a social historian, Kirby is a keen and knowledgeable amateur astronomer. Plenty of amusing anecdotes stand on their own without needing any deep social or cultural relevance. For example, there are the “phosphorus flare stars” of the 1930s – stars that occasionally showed a sudden and seemingly inexplicable phosphorus emission when viewed through a spectroscope. Eventually, they realised the flash didn’t come from the star – it was some bloke in the observatory striking a match to light his cigar.



Kirby's book is lighter on contextual analysis and commentary than Tucker's, which may make it less interesting for more serious readers. It also has a tendency to jump without warning from genuine misconceptions (which is what the book is about, according to the title) to "odd-but-true" facts – such as meteorites that have fallen on houses and cars, odd-shaped moons of Saturn, and the quirky names astronomers have given to some asteroids. Nevertheless, it's an easier read than Tucker's book, and more attractively packaged. It would make a perfect Christmas present for amateur astronomers, sci-fi buffs and fans of weirdness in general.

Andrew May
★★★★★

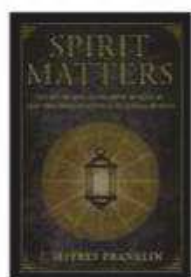
Spirit Matters

Occult Beliefs, Alternative Religions, and the Crisis of Faith in Victorian Britain

J Jeffrey Franklin

Cornell University Press 2018

Hb, 288pp, ind, \$49.95, ISBN 9781501715440



J Jeffrey Franklin, Professor of English at the University of Colorado, Denver, and author of *Serious Play, For the Lost Boys* and *The Lotus and the Lion*, presents a collection of essays (some previously published) on "nonmainstream or heterodox religious and spiritual beliefs – what in the twentieth century would come to be called 'alternative religions' – in nineteenth-century Great Britain."

Spirit Matters traces the Victorian-era development of modern occultism and spiritualism in England, as reflected – unsurprisingly, given Franklin's occupation – in select works of English literature, discussed in roughly chronological order. Franklin charts how 19th century colonialism, religious syncretism and the sciences – particularly psychology, archaeology and Darwin's theory of evolution – came to define a peculiarly English occultism, a "third contestant" that challenged

the hegemonies of mainstream Christianity and scientific materialism, themselves in conflict.

He begins the first section, 'Challenges to Christianity, and the Orthodox/Heterodox Boundary', with Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni* (1842) and *A Strange Story* (1862), fictional works concerned with the competing methods of scientific and supernatural inquiry. He then turns to Anthony Trollope's *The Vicar of Bullhampton* (1870), which subtly yet effectively questions Christian orthodoxy, and to the poet and essayist Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma* (1873), with its criticism of Christian dogmatism as viewed through the lens of Buddhist philosophy (however tinged with Christianity is Arnold's understanding of Buddhism).

Western reaction to Buddhism is further explored in the book's second section, 'The Interpenetration of Christianity and Buddhism'. Here, Franklin looks at two works of colonialist literature: William Knighton's *Forest Life in Ceylon* (1854), wherein an Anglican in Sri Lanka attempts to persuade a Theravada Buddhist of the legitimacy and authority of the Christian faith, and Anna Leonowen's *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (1870), a romanticised, Western view of Thailand, and the basis for the popular musical (1951) and film (1956) *The King and I*.

Part three, the 'Turn to Occultism', is the book's most fascinating section, with insightful discussions of the influence of Egyptology (using H Rider Haggard's *Cleopatra* (1889) as an example) and Eastern European folklore (represented by Bram Stoker's 1897 *Dracula*) – on English occultism. Finally, Franklin considers Mme Blavatsky's Theosophy to be a culmination of religious syncretism and colonialist appropriation, and the initiatory philosophical foundation of the modern New Age occultism by introducing an holistic "spiritual science", a common feature of numerous permutations of modern Western esotericism, wherein Western intellectuals, in an effort to reconcile the competing ideologies of spirit and matter, maintained that paranormal phenomena should be scientifically studied, and that

materialism was not the sole province of rationalism.

While not earth-shattering (the 19th century conflict between religion and science is well-established), *Spirit Matters* is persuasive and engaging, deserving of the attention of anyone interested in English literature or in the development of modern Western occultism.

Eric Hoffman

★★★★★

Vampira

Dark Goddess of Horror

W Scott Poole

Soft Skull Press 2014

Pb, 244p, illus), notes, \$16.95, ISBN 9781593765439

Scott Poole, an historian of popular culture, has pulled off a coup with *Vampira*, his biography of Elizabeth Syrjaniemi (aka Maila Nurmi). In a nutshell, a critique of the cultural milieu that empowered the persona of Vampira and an elegy to the mysterious 'outsider' he describes within. Drawing upon limited sources, Scott Poole explores a post-war generation struggling with conformity and compliance, aspirational culture and consumerism.

Born to Finnish parents in 1922, Maila finds herself in a closed society of traditional values and hard work. Her parents lived a somewhat itinerant life as jobbing newspaper editors before settling down in Gloucester, Massachusetts, where we find the young Maila, critically self-aware, finding solace in comics and occupying an elaborate fantasy world. Poole documents her far from ideal schooldays and explores the rootlessness that defined many of her generation. Unsurprisingly, after graduation Maila decamps to New York and later Los Angeles, seeking an entrée into showbusiness.

To his credit, Poole draws on contemporary discourses of gender and sexuality, the nuclear family and the concept of 'camp' to account for both the success and failure of Vampira. With a grounding in the borderline world of spook shows, burlesque and fetish magazines, Maila's marriage to Dean Riesner, an upcoming Hollywood screenwriter, put her in the right



place at the right time to exploit her otherworldly allure. So what went wrong? Inspired by cartoonist Charles Addams, the 'Beats' and fetish clothing, Maila wowed the Hollywood set that centred on Googie's restaurant and counted James Dean amongst her friends. Who better then to front a new show on the new medium of TV as a horror hostess!

Dig Me Later, Vampira aired in April 1954 on the Los Angeles station KABC and ran for one year. Public response was formidable as Vampira acted out the repressed sexuality of the American housewife and met the gaze of the desiring male population with her own transgressive vernacular. Too much, too soon, Poole suggests, and subsequent accolades and interviews on mainstream

vehicles such as the Red Skelton show, an Emmy nomination in 1954 and a feature in *Life* magazine could not prevent the show's cancellation. That said, Scott Poole's portrayal of Maila is not as a victim but as a character who dwelt at the margin – a bad, Beat girl – weathering the storm of the pernicious political agendas of the day, intolerant of transgression and the consolidation of a counterculture.

The post-1955 years are no less interesting. (She died in 2008.) A brief stint with Liberace, an encounter with the young Elvis and her encounter with a serial rapist prelude decades of relative quietude. Renewed media interest in Vampira during the 1970s and 80s mirrored a cultural revival of gothic horror and camp sexuality best seen in her promotion of the West Hollywood punk music scene. By 2008 Maila was living an almost anonymous life with few close friends and her death met with scant attention. Scott Poole has corrected this and has provided the reader with a fascinating narrative of her life and times, celebrity and anonymity, and a life on the social and cultural margins.

With excellent research resources and exhaustive appraisal, this is a must for all students of popular history and media culture.

Chris Hill

★★★★★

A megalithic tour guide

Very distracting design detracts from what is an informative study of the old stones – particularly the lesser known ones – of these islands

The Old Stones

A Field Guide to the Megalithic Sites of Britain and Ireland

Ed: Andy Burnham

Watkins 2018

Pb, 41pp, illus, bib, ind, £29.99 ISBN9781786781543

To avoid this becoming one of those offputting “good, but...” reviews, I will get the main negatives out the way first, since a significant aspect of this book undercuts my undivided recommendation of it.

This is a guidebook, divided into a myriad discrete sections served by a fussy design. To imbue it with a *Modern Antiquarian*-esque contemporary vibe, too much space is given over to headings for each site. Certain inexplicably chosen pages where white text sits on a dark background – never smooth to read for more than a few words – become distracting. For contributor sections where a topic is summarised in a few hundred words, this white-on-dark approach makes (design) sense, but also inconsistently applying it to some of the site descriptions is as perplexing as the sites under description, an issue compounded by the thin ITC Lubalin Graph typeface. While this just about works for a swift consultation; it is irksome as a sustained read. Some of the photographs are only slightly bigger than a large postage stamp, and every image of a rock art site, where detail is crucial, is similarly, ludicrously small. The designer should know that the weathered surface of a well-carved rock is as beautiful and beguiling as a well-framed landscape of megaliths.

The hoard of information, maps, and well-sized photographs override these issues, fortunately, and there

is otherwise no reason not to recommend this great collective effort. Unlike Julian Cope’s *The Modern Antiquarian*, it is relatively affordable and portable. The seven main regions are subdivided into counties and districts, from which many of the most noteworthy sites are described, often with great photographs.

Comprehensive map and geopositioning details for over a thousand prehistoric sites guide us to the midst of some of the most exciting meeting places of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages with important complexes, like Stonehenge, Avebury, Ness of Brodgar, and the Boyne Valley tombs receiving extra space. Yet it’s the obscure places that are this guide’s forte, the sites where no coach package tour or English Heritage car park can reach. The rock art sites that are included are fine ‘entry level’ sites, though I would prefer more of them, along with diagrams, even if that meant pruning some minor stone circles and lone menhirs.

Vicki Cummings’s introduction to the Neolithic and its types of monuments is succinct and well-referenced. Other specialist and non-specialist contributions outline a range of topics and thought-provoking theories, from feasting, colour, healing bluestones, Welsh place-names, propped stones, shadows, axes, dowsing, archæoastronomy, carved stone balls, recumbent circles, chalk artefacts, and archæoacoustics. There are even Top 10s for Urban Prehistory Sites, and Pieces of Music Inspired by Prehistory. There is no discussion of the formidable palaver of moving and setting megaliths in a world without iron or wheels, nor any concept of the numbers of people required,

which for dragging or digging can surely be fairly easily estimated as it has been for major sites like Silbury Hill and Stonehenge. Nor is there any space for head-on discussion of long-distance alignments, leys, or ‘earth-energy’ (although there are hints). Is this research now merely as unfashionable as Alexander Thom’s astronomical surveys once were? Even Terence Meaden’s notions find space here, and as hare-brained as his notions may be, the clan requires these seers of shadow.

To really get under the skin of the society and rites of Ancient British and Irish stone-movers, I recommend the old, bold *Rites of the Gods* by Aubrey Burl, which shows there was more afoot than simply being obsessed with surveying the sky, as some present authors argue, fixated on the final result over more prosaic reasons for such gatherings (“Trade? Knowledge not concerning celestial alignments? Epochal social change? Zzzz...”).

To its credit, the variety of voices in *The Old Stones* complements the various motivations for our prehistoric ancestors to build and assemble at these sites, even if it gives disproportionate weight to artistic and novel ideas over more practical concerns and profound outcomes, like social change. If you are planning a field tour of megalithic sites in Britain or Ireland (and if not, why not?), you would do well to have *The Old Stones* with you. And while we’re at it, let’s have a campaign for Nelson’s Column to be torn down and replaced with a dolmen. A splendid megalithic avenue on The Mall. **Jerry Glover**

★★★★★

The Lion Boy and Other Medical Curiosities

Jan Bondeson

Amberley Publishing 2018

Pb, 288pp, illus, £14.99, ISBN 9781445676289



Jan Bondeson has written about Gould and Pyle’s *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine* (1896) in these pages

[FT257:44–46]. *The Lion Boy and Other Medical Curiosities* is the third of his books to be inspired by that forteen classic – the others being *A Cabinet of Medical Curiosities* (1997) and *The Two-Headed Boy* (2000). Topics covered in the present volume include famous obese children [FT325:28–35], images in the eyes of murder victims captured in ‘octograms’ [FT339:36–41], and fasting artists [FT371:46–50]. Other chapters cover stories of sentience in severed heads, monstrous finger- and toenails, Feodor Machnow and other giants, “porcupine men” (afflicted with *ichthyosis hystrix*), Tom Thumb and other dwarfs both celebrated and obscure, and the evidence for hair turning rapidly white (*canities subita*). A chapter of miscellaneous oddities covers the world’s longest beards, photographs of conjoined twins, the double-nosed woman of Saint-Maigner, Stephan Bibrowki, later known as “Lionel the Lion Man”, and assorted prodigies. There’s a chapter entitled “Walking Around the World: From the Annals of Human Hyperpedestrianism”. Then there’s the tale of ‘Count Orloff’, advertised as “the World’s Only Ossified and Transparent Man”. The chapter on celebrated super-centenarians – such as the old Countess of Desmond [FT48:64–68], Old Parr, Henry Jenkins, Christian Drakenburg, and Thomas Laugher [FT232:44–49] – sadly demonstrates their claims of extreme longevity were most likely exaggerated, although all were of exceptional age. All in all, an engaging compendium of anomalous people, enlivened by a generous selection of illustrations, many from the author’s own collection.

Paul Sieveking

★★★★★



The SF and fantasy round-up

David V Barrett enjoys Italian magical realism, transported warriors, Norse shenanigans, lovers separated by time, a medic in an alternative WWI and a comic version of Gaiman's Shadow

The Book of Hidden Things

Francesco Dimitri

Titan Books 2018

Pb, 400pp, £8.99, ISBN 9781785657085

The Lightwatch Chronicles 1

The Guardians

JH Tepley

Filament Publishing 2018

Pb, 216pp, £11.99, ISBN 9781912256563

The Testament of Loki

Joanne M Harris

Gollancz 2018

Hb, 295pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781473202399

All Lies and Jest

Kate Harrad

Ghostwoods Books 2016

Pb, 185pp, £7.99, ISBN 9780993507700

Time Was

Ian McDonald

Tor 2018

Pb, 142pp, £9.99, ISBN 9780765391452

Witchmark

CL Polk

Tor 2018

Pb, 320pp, \$15.99, ISBN 9781250162687

American Gods 1

Shadow

Neil Gaiman, P Craig Russell & Scott Hampton

Headline 2018

Hb, £20.00, ISBN 978147251367

It's a huge risk to write a novel in a language other than your own. Italian magical realist writer Francesco Dimitri not only succeeds (thanking those who helped), *The Book of Hidden Things* is easily the best novel I've read this year, beautiful and compelling. For

the last 17 years four men who grew up in a small town in the toe of Italy have returned each June to meet and have a pizza and a few drinks. This year Art, who created this Pact, doesn't show up. He went missing years ago in their teens, returning days later with no explanation. But this time before he disappeared he'd been working on a weird manuscript, *The Book of Hidden Things*, which gradually reveals some of its mysteries. The author gets the characterisation and the individual voices of the three narrators spot on; we come to know each of them and care for them in different ways; we learn of the secrets they hold from each other despite a lifetime of close friendship; their illicit loves; their sacrifices; the complications of their families; their disturbing involvement with the local Mafia, with its close bonds and chill threat. The mystery and the tension ramp up throughout the novel right up to – literally – the last sentence. I rarely say a novel is unputdownable, but this one is – and magical in so many ways.

In contrast, Polish-born spiritual teacher JH Tepley was badly let down by her publisher; *The Lightwatch Chronicles 1: The Guardians* needed copy-editing to correct the often awkward sentence construction and grammar, and remove the purple prose. As with Dimitri's novel, three young men are searching for the fourth member of their group – but there the similarity ends. They are minor Stars, trainee warrior beings from another reality. After a battle with a demonoid in Japan they're transported to another world where they're taken under the wing of one of the Great Stars or Powers, the Holy Guardian Antares. She guides them, individually and collectively, as they prepare for a quest.

Unfortunately there's little actual plot in the novel, and the characters are unconvincing in their behaviour and language.

Joanne M Harris returns to Norse mythology with *The Testament of Loki*. Following Ragnarok, the trickster god manages to escape from centuries of torment in the Netherworld into, yes, a Norse fantasy computer game – and from there it's only a quick hop into inhabiting the body of a teenage girl rejoicing in the name of Jumps. Inevitably he meets up with other Norse gods who have followed the same path, and they hatch convoluted plots full of trickery against each other to regain their powers and get back to their own world. The story's nicely complex – but the main problem with this novel is Loki's voice: from the very beginning he comes over as a misunderstood, petulant teenager with the whole world against him. Add to that the fact that Jumps has every right to be a petulant teenager, having been hijacked by Loki, and the whole novel is about a couple of unlikeable whining brats. As for the old gods getting stuck in our modern world... Tom Holt does it so much better.

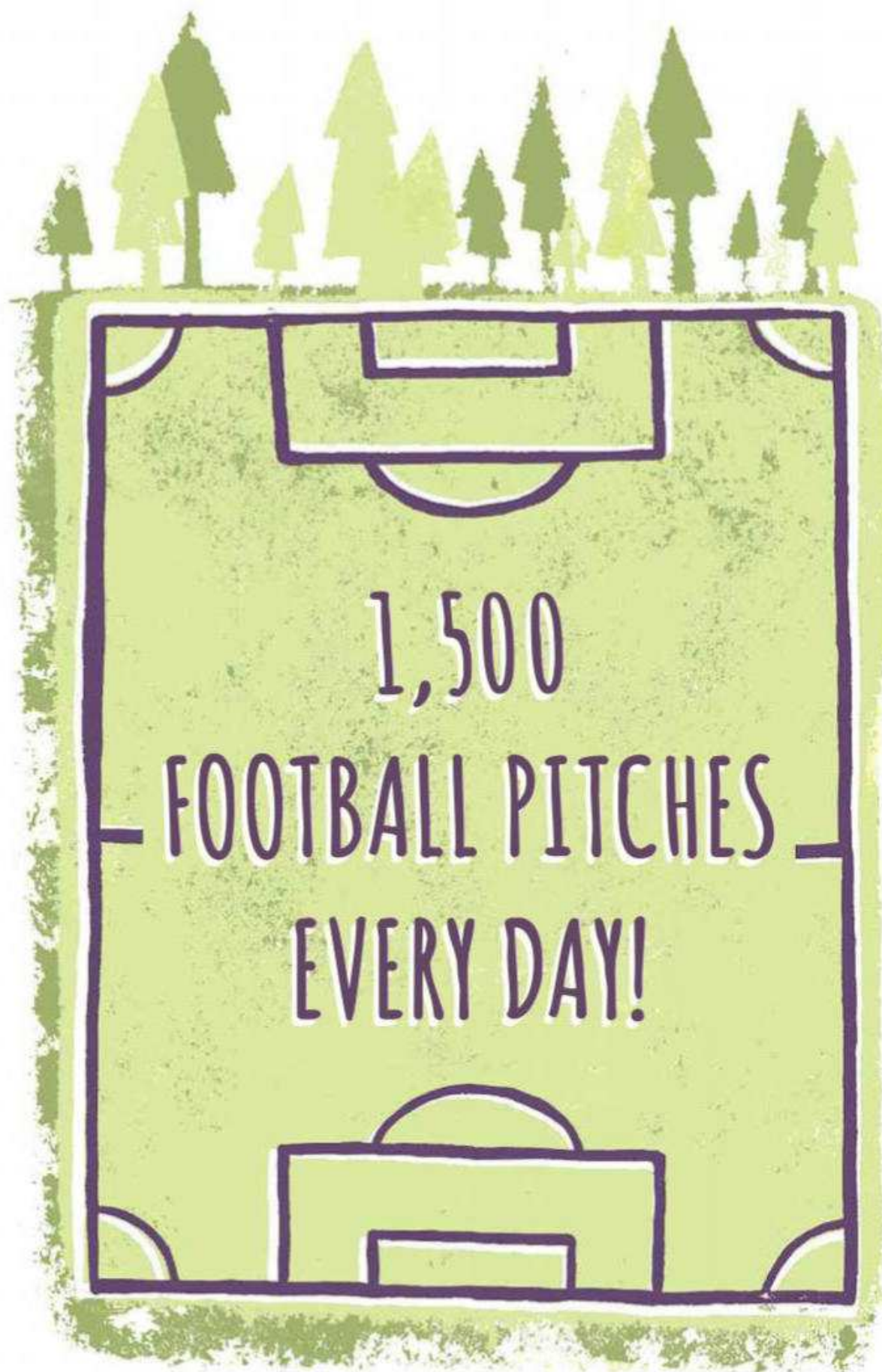
I'm including a novel from two years ago simply because I've just read it and it's great fun and other people should have the pleasure of reading it. Britain is rapidly following the Christian United States into an autocratic theocracy. Too radical for her small town, Elinor Rosewood arrives in London determined to find something new and to make her mark. She discovers a vibrant sub-culture of goths and vampires, were-creatures and kink – and a Christian conspiracy theory about the Rapture. Kate Harrad's *All Lies and Jest* is a delightful romp, wonderfully wacky but sometimes scarily

close to reality in its digs at fundamentalist oppression.

Time Was is a beautiful love story across time by Ian McDonald. Meeting in World War II, Tom and Ben become lovers. Separated by a military experiment that goes wrong, they're thrown across time; but they keep meeting up, finding each other by messages slipped into a book of poetry left in bookshops across Europe. In the present day a book dealer discovers one of their messages, and begins his own quest to unravel the mystery.

CL Polk's *Witchmark* is a wonderful creation. Miles Singer is a doctor dealing with the physical and psychological injuries of the wounded from an alternate First World War, while hiding the dangerous secret that he actually has healing powers. For Miles is more than he is letting on; he is from one of the ruling families, who use their powers to control society. His relationships with his sister, his father and his lover are beautifully drawn. The world of the novel, and the magic at its heart, are a complex creation revealed bit by bit as the story unfolds. This is an astonishing first novel from a Canadian writer; I'm looking forward to whatever she comes up with next.

American Gods 1: Shadow collects the first nine issues of the comic version of Neil Gaiman's novel. Shadow is released from prison to discover that his wife has just been killed in a car accident. He's offered a job as bodyguard to a one-eyed man called Mr Wednesday – and becomes embroiled in the affairs of the Norse gods walking the Earth in human form today. Superbly scripted by P Craig Russell and beautifully illustrated by Scott Hampton, this is one to go back to and enjoy again and again.



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The Mother of Sighs revisited

Luca Guadagnino jettisons much of what made Dario Argento's classic 1977 horror film so memorable, and this very different 'cover version' yields both bold creative decisions and *longeurs*



Suspiria

Dir Luca Guadagnino, Italy/US 2018
On UK release from 16 November

Horror fans have been both excited and worried about this film ever since it was announced what seems like decades ago. Excited because the original, directed by Dario Argento and released in 1977, is an undisputed classic of the genre and the prospect of a modern take on it by an acclaimed director promised much; and worried because the conditions under which the original was made – the era, the technology, the artistic sensibility – have gone, never to return. Moreover, director Luca Guadagnino had no horror on his CV and was coming to the film on the back of the languid, dreamy romance of *Call Me by Your Name*. The worry therefore was that none of the elements that made the original great could possibly be replicated. Not only that, but

It relies on muted colours to convey an oppressive atmosphere

recent film history is littered with examples of remakes and reboots that should never have got beyond the idea stage. The nagging question remained: why should something so perfect be remade at all?

Guadagnino has taken great pains to stress that his film is not, in fact, a remake but a "cover version". Quite what the distinction is hasn't really been articulated, but it's somewhat disingenuous to make such a claim when you've just shot a horror film about a European dance academy and called it *Suspiria*. This new film, though, is sufficiently dissimilar from the original to sidestep such

questions and exist in its own right, because apart from that basic story outline it takes a markedly different approach.

It's 1977 in Berlin, a city terrorised by the Red Army Faction and the Baader-Meinhoff gang; Susie Bannion (Dakota Johnson, from the *50 Shades...* films), a young American girl, arrives at the Markos Dance Academy. Wowing the matrons at her audition, she is immediately accepted and becomes the protégée of the company's director, Madame Blanc (Tilda Swinton, on fine form). Everything is going swimmingly apart from the nagging feeling among some of the students about the sudden exit from the academy of Patricia (a cameo from Chloe Grace Moretz). One student in particular, Sara (Mia Goth), who has befriended Susie, begins to suspect that Patricia didn't quit to follow through on her revolutionary political beliefs, as Blanc says, but instead

disappeared under more sinister circumstances.

Whereas Argento's film was a series of nightmarish set-pieces of incredible flair and vivid colour, Guadagnino's unfolds at a deliberately slow pace and at times seems more like a detective movie, as various characters attempt to get to the bottom of Patricia's disappearance. It eschews Argento's palette, instead relying on muted colours to convey an oppressive atmosphere of a city and dance academy both at the mercy of forces beyond their control. The problem with this approach is that it renders the film unattractive and unmemorable. It also feels exploitative: the film admirably has an almost entirely female cast but some seem to be there purely to have the male director's camera leer unpleasantly at their bodies. The biggest issue though is that it is punishingly long at 152 minutes. This is basically a haunted house story and as such could surely have been told in less than two and a half hours; that sparse premise simply isn't enough to sustain a film of this length and it does drag badly.

That said, it is engrossing for the most part, offers a few nice nods to the original and has some gruesome, intense scenes that are as shocking as anything in Argento's film. The way it is told, the radically different aesthetic and the subplots that broaden it out make the film an entirely different viewing experience to the original and it should therefore be seen as a separate entity. It was never going to be Argento's *Suspiria* but by virtue of the film-makers' creative decisions it is a different *Suspiria*. Take a cushion though.

Daniel King



THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.peterlaws.co.uk)

Night of the Creeps

Dir Fred Dekker, US 1986
Eureka, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

Monkey Shines

Dir George Romero, US 1988
Eureka, £14.99 (Dual format)

Troll: The Complete Collection

Dir John Carl Buechler / Claudio Fragasso, US 1986
Eureka, £29.99 (Dual format)

While shoulder pads and frizzy hair were big in the 1980s, many other things got smaller. Computers no longer took up an entire room and stereo systems could now fit into the swishy pocket of a fire-trap tracksuit. Monsters shrank too. No longer did studios have to build massive, expensive mutant insects to scare an audience silly. Films like *Gremlins* (1984) proved that creatures could work just as well in very small packages, and prompted a slew of little rubber monster movies like *Ghoulies* (1985), *Critters* (1986) and *The Gate* (1987). This month, Eureka have unleashed an entire posse of the little ankle-biters on Blu-ray.

First up is the awesome *Night of the Creeps* (1986), in which a couple of nerdy virgins mess up a college prank involving the theft of a corpse and instead end up unleashing tiny alien worm creatures, which raise an army of dead jocks on Prom Night. Beloved by cult movie buffs, *Night of the Creeps* is a horror fan's delight – for example, all the characters are named after famous horror directors – but the mature direction of a young Fred Dekker adds depth, style and invention, along with a script brimming with quotable lines. Some of



Troll 2 is known globally as one of the worst movies ever made

the best moments come from Tom Atkins, with a superb turn as the wisecracking, constantly suicidal detective. “Thrill me,” he says. *Night of the Creeps* often does exactly that.

From evil little worms to evil little primates, with George A Romero's curious little thriller, *Monkey Shines* (1988). Here, a car accident leaves Alan Mann a paraplegic. The former athlete thinks his life is over, until he's given Ella, an intelligent service monkey who can pass him what he needs, turn the pages of a book and probably wipe his arse for him too. Well, she's pretty helpful, anyway, until the bond between man and monkey gets so strong that Ella becomes a homicidal conduit for Alan's anger and frustration. This was Romero's first studio film, and it does feel more restrained and cautious than his previous work. Yet while it sometimes feels

like a TV movie, the pain and frustration of living with a disability is sensitively handled, and the externalised rage element is an interesting, powerful idea. How well it works as a horror film, however, may well depend on how much you like (or, indeed, dislike) monkeys.

There's more midget-mayhem in *Troll* (1986), where a kid called Harry Potter (seriously) moves into an apartment block stuffed with wizards, nymphs, fairies and waddling Trolls. It's an okay film and all (with a spectacular score from Richard Band) but the best thing about *Troll* is that it spawned the sequel... *Troll 2*.

Yep, I'm proud to admit it: I'm one of those freaks who worship at the altar of *Troll 2* – known globally as one of the worst movies ever made. It's true, too. Rarely has a film screwed up almost every single production element (acting, plot, effects, you name it) and yet wound up being so irresistibly brilliant and just darn loveable. Even the concept itself is crazy: vegan trolls murder humans by turning them into edible chlorophyll, but a dead grandpa and his grandson (who likes pissing on the family dinner) fight back with a double decker baloney sandwich. The best part? None of this insanity is played as comedy. It's all deadly serious, which will have you and your friends totally cracking up. I insist you watch this – preferably with company.

And how wonderful of Eureka to include the feature-length documentary *Best Worst Movie* in this release. Skilfully directed by Michael Stephenson (the child star of *Troll 2*, no less) the doc reveals the wave of affection for what many call the crappiest movie on Earth. There's something rather moving about it all – that a small, ignored and overshadowed beast from decades past, ends up becoming a giant amongst certain modern audiences.

The Mothman of Point Pleasant

Invasion on Chestnut Ridge

Dir Seth Breedlove, US 2017
Small Town Monsters, \$14.99 each

Readers of *Fortean Times* are undoubtedly aware of the Mothman; this classic cluster of high strangeness events of the late 1960s in Point Pleasant, West Virginia, is certainly among the best known of fortean phenomena. It is therefore entirely appropriate that it is the subject of the fourth instalment of Seth Breedlove's ongoing documentary series, “Small Town Monsters” – previous films include *The Minerva Monster* (2015), *The Beast of Whitehall*, and *The Boggy Creek Monster* (both 2016).

The Mothman of Point Pleasant is a moody, atmospheric look at the strange events occurring in the Point Pleasant area from colonisation to the present day. Boggy Creek and Lizard Man chronicler Lyle Blackburn provides the narration; with director Breedlove, he also co-wrote the film's notably comprehensive script. The film begins, predictably, with the curse of Chief Cornstalk, an urban legend long held to be the source of seemingly every terrible event to afflict the region from the 1700s onward, before moving on to initial sightings of a “bird-man” in the first half of the 20th century. In fact, the Point Pleasant region has seen more than its fair share of paranormal phenomena: UFOs, thunderbirds, and a plethora of other unexplained happenings. Notably, sightings of UFOs, menacing Men in Black, and the Mothman, which one eyewitness in the film describes as a manifestation of pure, almost Satanic evil – West Virginia is in the Bible Belt after all – fell precipitously following the unexpected tragic collapse of the Silver Bridge between Point Pleasant and neighbouring Gallipolis, Ohio, in December 1967. In fact, the Mothman was later folded into that tragedy, as a harbinger of doom, somehow anticipating the disaster.

As the series's title indicates, the filmmakers' emphasis is on the decided importance of



setting: indeed, much of the public's fascination with the Mothman sightings of the 1960s – the events attracted worldwide attention in the mass media – is largely the result of the overall creepiness of the places where they occurred, places that capture the imagination: dark country roads, an abandoned power plant, and, most evocatively, the so-called “TNT” area, an abandoned WWII munitions storage facility.

The media response to the sightings was largely the result of the efforts of local journalist Mary Hyre, whose reporting later attracted the attentions of fortune author John Keel and publisher/author Gray Barker, resulting in two indisputable classics of fortune literature: Barker's self-published *The Silver Bridge* (1970) and Keel's *The Mothman Prophecies* (1975).

By no means as well known as Mothman are the 1969 Kecksburg UFO crash and the 1973-74 Bigfoot/UFO/high strangeness events that occurred in the vast, relatively undeveloped and unexplored Chestnut Ridge area of western Pennsylvania, along with more recent encounters with everything from Dogman to thunderbirds to out-of-place animals. These events continue to be principally chronicled by area veteran researcher Stan Gordon, whose interview appropriately makes up the bulk of *Invasion on Chestnut Ridge*, though interviews with several eyewitnesses and other locals are also included.

Arguably set in motion by the 1973 UFO abduction in Pascagoula, Arkansas, 1973-1974 saw a nationwide surge in paranormal events, and the region in western Pennsylvania was among a number of paranormal hot spots to experience a significant wave of UFO sightings. Curiously, the sightings along the Chestnut Ridge were often accompanied by the appearance of tall, menacing, hairy creatures with abnormally long arms and strange, glowing red or green eyes. These creatures were at various times seen carrying glowing orbs and even entering or exiting floating, glowing lights and flying metallic objects.

Regrettably, there isn't much in the way of original research presented in these documentaries, and readers of Keel and Gordon will be familiar with the material. Both films make attempts at

dramatic recreations that feature embarrassingly low-budget CGI animation that very often falls flat, in particular the recreation of the spectacularly weird UFO/Bigfoot sighting at a farm outside Fayetteville, recounted in greater detail in Gordon's essential *Silent Invasion* (2010), an authoritative account of these encounters.

Unlike many similar direct-to-DVD “documentaries”, these films feature imaginative musical scores, effective editing, and coherent organisation. Regrettably, the narrators are less good and extras are limited to brief making-of featurettes. The cover design and title card for *Invasion* sports a retro design meant to evoke a 1980s VHS tape and like those videotapes these DVDs frustratingly lack chapter breaks; these would be welcome in future releases.

Despite these reservations, Breedlove and company are nevertheless skilled filmmakers and are to be commended for taking their subjects seriously, for their in-depth approach, and for maintaining a sense of the uncanny that accompanies the high strangeness events depicted. At the conclusion of *Invasion*, for example, the narrator asks: “How do we talk about phenomena that are continuously shifting, always just out of reach? How do we describe the apparition already disappearing in the mist and the rolling slopes of the hills? The silent presence of the Chestnut Ridge itself is the only thing permanent, that and the persistence of human curiosity.”

Seen in this light, Breedlove's films are somewhat reminiscent of Ralph Coon's superior, little-seen masterpiece of Americana, *Whispers from Space* (1995), a biography of Gray Barker, a film that perfectly captures the altogether prosaic and decidedly human aspect of the paranormal, how apparently average – and, in Barker's case, somewhat tragic – people and otherwise unremarkable small towns can be transformed by the mysterious; and, in turn, how such people and places manifest events and ideas that manage to alter both their immediate environment and the larger culture as a whole. It is folklore in the making.

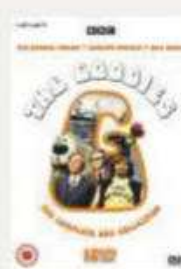
Eric Hoffmann



TELEVISION

THE GOODIES: COMPLETE BBC COLLECTION

Network, £59.99 (DVD)



It's strange that it's taken this long for *The Goodies* to get a (nearly) comprehensive home entertainment release when nearly every 1970s comedy from *It Ain't Half Hot Mum* to *Love Thy Neighbour* has already received this sort of treatment. And *The Goodies* was in a different league altogether: during its heyday, it was must-see telly that produced some iconic comedy

moments for a whole generation, from Kitten Kong demolishing the Post Office Tower to men in outsized flat caps demonstrating the ancient Lancastrian martial art of Ecky Thump. Nevertheless, the series was not repeated on television and only odd episodes have received DVD releases over the years, so Network's 12-disc, eight-season set, collecting every episode made for the BBC (there was a final series for ‘the other side’ in 1982) will be an invaluable release for both aficionados of British comedy and all those with an aching nostalgia for the 1970s.

A lack of opportunities to actually see *The Goodies* since the original broadcasts means that the ‘shock of the old’ is inevitable when watching the show now, in a way that doesn't pertain when revisiting the omnipresent *Dad's Army*, say. Graeme Garden's mad scientist, Tim Brooke-Taylor's cowardly royalist and Bill Oddie's hippy troublemaker feel familiar enough, but – particularly in the early episodes – the past looks a lot like a foreign country, and contemporary sensibilities may struggle when confronted with stories that feature brazen upskirting and outbreaks of blackface. But this is also where *The Goodies* differs hugely from its *Monty Python* predecessors, mixing slapstick and surrealism with a commitment to topical satire or parody: targets are taken straight from the headlines of the day – factory farming, police brutality, pollution, consumerism, ‘women's lib’ – while the determination to grapple with the zeitgeist also means that the show is a sort of compendium of 1970s fads, fascinations and fashions, from safari parks and ballroom dancing to pirate radio and punk rock. Again, while the Pythons' seminal approach to TV comedy was fourth wall-breaking and deconstructive, operating at an essentially formal level, *The Goodies*, for all its emphasis on the zany and surreal, is more traditional, splicing of the pleasures of the sketch show and physical comedy routines into the narrative structure of the sitcom: less innovative, perhaps, but perfect for generating a near infinity of possible storylines, in which our heroes do “anything, anywhere, anytime”. It's also a happier kind of comedy; if underlying the formal cleverness of the Python style is a kind of disgust – at both the repressed self and the repressive other – *The Goodies* offers a utopian vision of personal liberation: “Take a little good advice/try a trip to paradise/It's not hard to find/you've got it on your mind/Can't pretend it wouldn't be nice/It's whatever turns you on,” as the theme tune has it.

Given that this is the decade in which FT was founded, it's perhaps not surprising that there's a wealth of fortune to be found here, too, including haunted houses, the Loch Ness Monster, a lost tribe (in Sevenoaks), military cover-ups, rabbits on the Moon, extinct creatures found alive, close encounters, a gas that turns people into clowns, a plague of Rolf Harrises, and the decade's tabloid fascination with black magic and the occult.

Is it still funny? Yes, in places, very; but also inevitably dated, at times surprisingly draggy (no, not in that way, despite Tim Brooke-Taylor's almost weekly flirtation with female dress) and definitely not to be binge-watched, as this tired reviewer can attest. It's hard, though, to imagine a more deserving historic TV release this year.

David Sutton ★★★★★



SOUNDS PECULIAR BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called ‘the airwaves’.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore ‘pirate’ pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality ‘spoken word’ content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of ‘legitimate’ broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...



Podcast: Cults

www.parcast.com/cults/

Hosts: Greg Polcyn and

Vanessa Richardson

Episode Count: 45+

Format: Storytelling and analysis

Established: September 2017

Frequency: Weekly, every

Tuesday

Topics: Cults

One of the joys of many podcasts – both those of a fortean nature and those concerned with more mainstream topics – is the fact that the medium is open to just about everybody. Given a laptop, a decent microphone, and some cheap software, anyone can create and distribute their very own podcast. However, such has been the boom in podcast listening that the sector is becoming ever more professional. *Cults*, which focuses on cult leaders and their followers, is just such an example. It is produced

by a professional media company (Cutler Media) and is available on a network – the Parcast Network – that offers a platform to podcasts covering many different subjects, from ‘Serial Killers’ to ‘Great Women of Business’, ‘Unexplained Mysteries’ to ‘Female Criminals’.

That very polished professionalism may be at the heart of the problem with *Cults*. It’s a great podcast, packed with information on cults both well known and obscure, but it is sometimes far too slick, scripted, and, well... American, for its own good. The scripting is so tight – and the opportunities for spontaneity on behalf of the otherwise fine presenters Greg Polcyn and Vanessa Richardson so slight – that it can come across as awkward and stilted. The attempted casual banter between the hosts, obviously also heavily pre-scripted, can sometimes be cringe inducing.

That aside, however, *Cults* is mostly doing a good job. Individual episodes are about an hour in length (earlier episodes tended to come in at around 45 minutes) and most real-world cults require a two-part episode to fully get into the details of what they are about and who the personalities involved are. The aim of the podcast is outlined thus: “Mystery. Manipulation. Murder. Cults are associated with all of these. But what really

goes on inside a cult? More specifically, what goes on inside the minds of people who join cults and leaders who start them? [*Cults* will] explore the history and psychology behind the most notorious cults.”

Whether presenters Polcyn and Richardson really get ‘inside the minds’ of either cult leaders or those who follow them is debatable, but they do a decent enough job of telling the stories of various modern cults. The show essentially serves as a useful primer, an introduction to the background details of many cults you’ll have heard of and a good few that you probably haven’t. Rapidly approaching 50 instalments, they are not running short of material yet.

The first episode started on safe territory with ‘The Manson Cult’, a biography of Charles Manson prior to establishing ‘The Family’, with the second instalment dealing with the notorious Tate-LaBianca killings of 1969. Although the hosts go to great pains to downplay their psychological qualifications (their lack of any is usually mentioned every episode), they can’t help but apply cod psychology to their subjects. So, Manson was “charismatic and manipulative”, so much so that he was able to convince others to carry out crimes for him. The second part looks more closely at the Manson Family, asking who were

the cult members, how Manson persuaded them to join him, and how he kept them involved even as the criminal activity escalated from shoplifting food to murder. That second instalment offers a more rounded look at the techniques used by a cult leader, and succeeds where the first really failed to pin down what made Manson unique.

As the show goes on it takes in the Heaven’s Gate UFO cult, David Berg and the Children of God, the Japanese Aum Shinriko, David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, and (inevitably) Jim Jones and the Peoples’ Temple. That last one is a particularly good example of what this podcast gets right, offering a two hour (across two instalments) account of Jones’s rise and fall, exploring his background, what the cult was all about, and getting into detail about the downfall of all involved.

Cults also dips into groups and organisations you might be less familiar with, such as the Sect of Nacozari, who practised human sacrifice between 2009 and 2012; the Nuwabian Nation, led by Dwight York who exploited his cult members for his own financial gain; or the Canadian Ant Hill Kids, led by Roch Theriault, who took his followers into the woods to await the end of the world.


Strengths: Professionally produced, packaged in episodes of no more than an hour.

Weaknesses: Heavily scripted, occasionally stilted presentation style.

Recommended Episodes: Eps 3 + 4 Heaven’s Gate: Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles; Ep 19 + 20 The Peoples’ Temple: Jim Jones; Ep 38 + 39 The Moonies: Sun Myung Moon; Ep 40 + 41 The NarcoSatanists: Adolfo Jesus Constanzo;

Verdict: If you can get over the occasionally stilted presentational style, *Cults* is a great introduction to the familiar and not-so-familiar world of weird organisations.

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- Is the tech any good?
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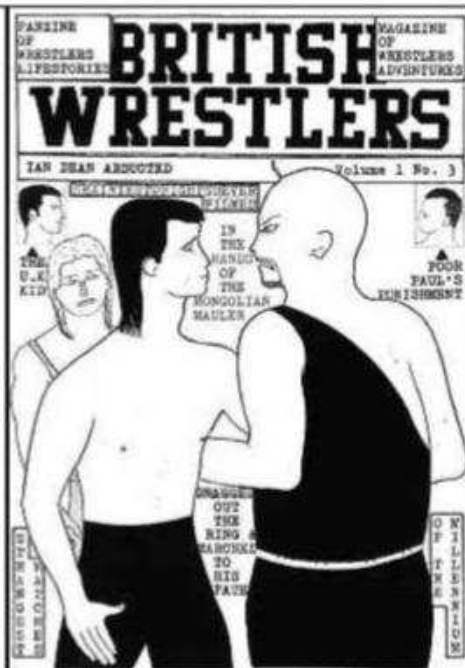
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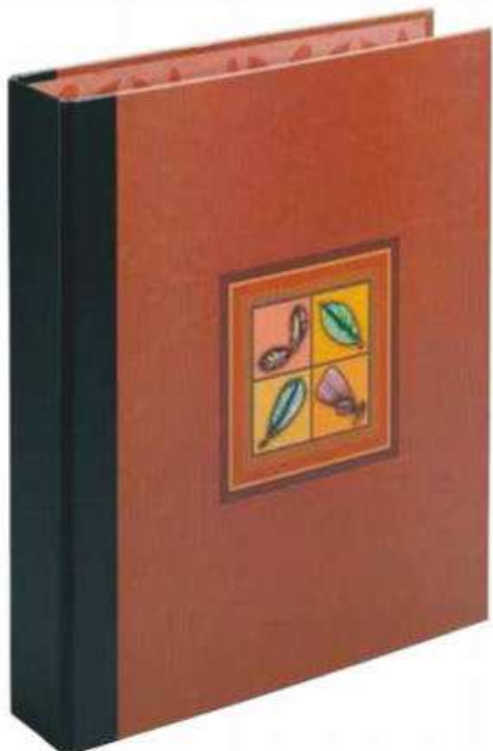
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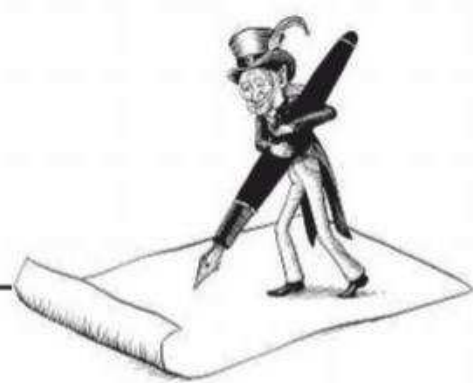
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LETTERS

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Highgate denizen

Regarding the letter about the mysterious figure in the top hat at London's Highgate Cemetery [FT367:77]: I went there with my wife, daughter and three-year-old granddaughter a couple of years back. While there, my granddaughter became agitated, pointing and asking, "Who is the scary man in the hood?" There was no one there to be seen.

Once home, my daughter got her to draw a picture of what she saw, and it looked like the Emperor from the *Star Wars* films. They say that children can be more sensitive to the paranormal, so what she saw was anyone's guess....

Terry Wilkinson
Wimbledon

New World ape

Regarding the debate about the Nazca 'ape' [FT367:14, 369:73, 371:73]: in the magazine I edit, *Flying Snake* (vol.4, no.12, Sept 2017), I presented a story from the *Idaho Falls Times* of 30 August 1894 concerning a large simian in Nicaragua: "On an island off the Mosquito coast, Nicaragua, Central America, there is a species of ape very closely resembling the African gorilla, both in size and in its sunny disposition. How it came there is only a matter of conjecture – for it departs unduly from the characteristics of the American monkey tribe."

I added that the Mosquito coast is on the north-east coast of Nicaragua and perhaps a ship had been wrecked on that coast a long time ago and a gorilla or gorillas had escaped and bred.

Richard Muirhead
By email

The Furred Reich

Reading SD Tucker's article on Cats and Catastrophe Theory [FT369:46-53], I was reminded that throughout history there have been people who seem to be convinced they are living in the End Times. There is always someone ready to claim that we are living in Kali Yuga. I guess that, some day, they may be correct. As a certain chap once said: "One measures a circle beginning anywhere". It

SIMULACRA CORNER



Tree giraffe?

Ludo Noens photographed this wooden chap at the seaside-resort De Haan aan Zee/Coq-sur-Mer on the Belgian coast.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

seems odd that people like to place themselves at the nadir.

Euan Smith
By email

Copycat

It is not just humans and parrots who can master mimicry. I know a cat that has absorbed the sounds of other beings into his vocabulary. I have now come to realise that this copycat behaviour is used in an attempt to lure and communicate with both friends and prey. The first instance I noticed was a twittering at the window whenever sparrows moved about in the hedge outside. At first I thought the cat was just responding with his own call, but soon noticed that the call was very similar to that of the birds. The harsh, short, shrill distress call of a squirrel was then added to his repertoire.

An example of the sophistication of his mimicry was demonstrated to me when I went to the tree at the bottom of the garden

after many minutes of hearing a squirrel calling out. I spotted the squirrel up the tree, upside down on the trunk and nattering away. On the bench sat the cat, seemingly ignoring me, intently looking up the tree and nattering back at the squirrel in the same voice. Since then, certain words or sounds I direct specifically at the cat, in whatever tone, have often been echoed back at me, to a point where it sounds like my words are flowing from his mouth, albeit in a more primitive delivery.

Stefan Badham
Portsmouth, Hampshire

Flying figments

Concerning the Haunebu II model of a supposed Nazi UFO [FT370:32]: as one of my hobbies is model aircraft, I thought I would check the website of the mail order company I use for my kits to see if they were still available. I lost interest when I saw the price, but was surprised to see

two other models of the same subject listed, very similar in appearance, if not actually identical. Also for sale was a set of after-market super-detail parts designed for a kit by yet another manufacturer. So it seems that at least four companies have marketed a model of something that is, presumably, a figment of the imagination.

Steve Yates
Erdington, Birmingham

Convergent evolution

I was fascinated by the photograph of the hammerhead flatworm [FT371:25]. My first encounter with this platyhelminth was in a TV documentary about remote valleys in China. It struck me immediately as an extreme example of a convergent evolution. Only hammerhead sharks have their key sensory organs so disposed. Convergent evolution is often cited by cryptozoologists and exobiologists as evidence that there are just so many variations on a theme.

Nick Warren
Pinner, Middlesex

Stair ghosts

Talking to my cousin, she mentioned that she had seen her granny at the top of the stairs, in her old house. This reminded me that another cousin, who lived next door to her, had seen the ghost of his dead sister at the top of his stairs. My father also said that he had seen a ghost on the landing of his old family home. Are stairs a common location for ghost sightings?

Tony Sandy
By email

Whitehead

The name coincidence described at the end of the report on the inquest into the mysterious burning death of John Nolan [FT370:25] reminded me of another from many years ago. At my alma mater, King Edward VII School in Sheffield, shortly after I had left, some jokers placed a bag of flour over a trap door held in place by a piece of string which was being slowly burnt by a candle flame –

LETTERS

all very ingenious. This was all set to take place during a prize-giving ceremony.

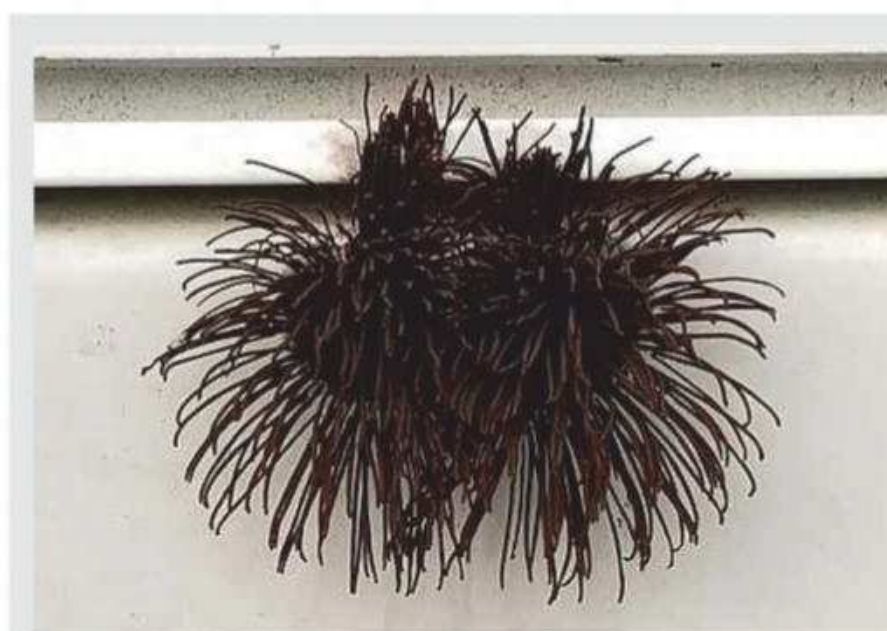
The string duly snapped and the flour scored a direct hit, covering the deputy head-teacher who was reading out the names of prizewinners. Naturally, the entire hall erupted while he tried to regain some semblance of dignity, as much as he could with about a kilo of flour on his head. But then he had to read out the name of the next prize-winner – Whitehead. After which the entire audience were rolling about laughing. I felt a slight twinge of regret as I personally held him in high regard as a great mathematics teacher.

Dr Peter Smith

By email

War casualties

Mythchaser [FT371:27] asked if traffic accidents caused by the blackout during WWII killed more people than enemy bombing. Short answer: no. The total road accident casualties for 1939-1945 were 50,444 including the two worst years on record – 8,609 in 1940 and 9,169 in 1941. However, fatalities before 1939 were 6,000 to 7,000 a year so it's not clear how many extra deaths can be attributed to the blackout. Figures for civilian deaths due to wartime bombing vary a bit between sources: The official history has 51,509 while some other sources have 40,000 to 45,000. I think the discrepancy



Spiny thing

My wife Beth came across this unusual object above a window on our property. It was about 6in (15cm) in diameter. When she tapped it, it released a grey puff of smoke and appeared to be oozing a liquid trail. She witnessed neither its arrival nor its departure. Can anyone identify it?

Ron Stewart, *Melville, New York*

Dr Karl Shuker comments: it reminds me of the very hairy/spiny caterpillar of the giant leopard moth Hypercompe scribonia, which is indeed native to NY. However, this beastie seems to have longer, browner spines than the leopard moth's caterpillar, so it could be a related species. Here's a video of the leopard moth's caterpillar: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbvCs1VU_G4

is that the lower figures are for the Blitz only (September 1940 to May 1941) – which saw 43,500 civilians killed; but a further 8,000 were killed in the rest of the war.

Richard Cameron

Ruislip, Middlesex

Q Who?

Reading 'Inside the QAnon Conspiracy' [FT371:32-39], it seems to me that you're missing an obvious origin of the tag Q: *Star Trek*. And if Q's posts aren't in character with that trouble-making trickster figure, then I don't know what is...

Dave Nilsson

By email

Denial denied

As a person who values scepticism, I would like to clarify a reference in Alan Murdie's SHC report (FT370:22-25, note 5). He

writes that the reporting of the 2017 John Nolan case resulted in the "deputy editor of *Skeptical Inquirer* in the US [Benjamin Radford] posting a statement that [SHC] does not exist." For this, Murdie references the "Skeptic Review" website. This site is unaffiliated with Radford but points to his 2013 piece (<https://www.livescience.com/42080-spontaneous-human-combustion.html>) called "Spontaneous Human Combustion: Facts & Theories", outlining the problems with the SHC idea. It is the "Skeptic Review" editor, not Radford, who states: "Spontaneous combustion, as far as we know, does not scientifically exist".

SHC elicits widespread rejection from the scientific community, for good reason. I appreciate that the critical viewpoint is mentioned, but this bizarre "Skeptic Review" site – a confusing mishmash of politics, religion and "inspiration", among other disconnected top-

ics – is hardly worth referencing at all. I prefer a primary source in all cases.

Sharon Hill

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Ben Radford comments: I hadn't seen that piece, and appreciate the clarification. As Sharon correctly notes, I am not affiliated with the "Skeptic Review" website and do not endorse any positions therein unless it's something written by me and aggregated (probably without my permission) on the site. What I wrote can be found in the link Sharon provided: "Though there is no scientific evidence that SHC exists, now and then a case makes the news when officials cannot find another explanation." This is significantly more nuanced than "SHC does not exist".

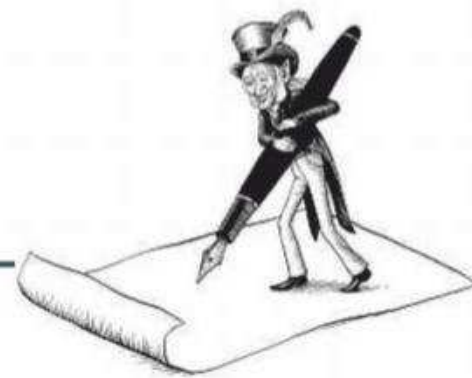
Dragons & ape rape

In his review of Dr Karl Shuker's excellent book *Dragons in Zoology, Cryptozoology and Culture* [FT371:60-61], the Hierophant's Apprentice writes: "... no one has reliably caught or photographed a dragon, which [is] patently the product of the imagination..." In fact, dragons have been recorded in every culture on Earth (many of whom never met) and stories of them traced back 40,000 years. Can something so perennial be said with any certainty to be the product of imagination? Sightings have been recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and many far older tomes from the Orient. Nor are sightings confined to the ancient past. In my book *Dragons: More Than A Myth?* I list many sightings of dragon-like beasts in the modern age. Indeed I have spoken to witnesses in Indo-China, West Africa and Mongolia who all, independently, gave the same, small details. Whether these encounters are with flesh and blood creatures or some form of paranormal manifestation (or indeed a mix of the two) is debatable, but 40,000 years worth of dragon lore cannot be so glibly dismissed.

● Re David Poulten's letter 'Ape Rape' [FT371:73], primatologist Birute Galdikas witnessed her cook, a Dyak woman, being raped



PAUL TAYLOR



by an orang-utan named Gundul in Borneo. She recorded it in her book *Reflections of Eden*. “I began to realize that Gundul did not intend to harm the cook, but had something else in mind. The cook stopped struggling. ‘It’s all right,’ she murmured. She lay back in my arms, with Gundul on top of her. Gundul was very calm and deliberate. He raped the cook. As he moved rhythmically back and forth, his eyes rolled upward to the heavens.”

The famous bipedal chimp ‘Oliver’ [FT17:11, 91:47, 95:15, 120:48-49, 292:21] acquired by animal trainers Frank and Janet Berger, showed a sexual interest in Janet as he became an adult. Oliver even attempted to mate with her.

Richard Freeman

Zoological Director, The Centre for Fortean Zoology. Exeter

Enfield Poltergeist

Regarding the statement by Stephen Volk (FT370:73) that Guy Playfair was an ‘adviser’ to the October 1992 BBC play and broadcast *Ghostwatch*, may I point out this was previously corrected by Guy Playfair himself in a letter to *Fortean Times*, published 15 years ago?

Playfair wrote as follows: “When originally approached by Mr Volk and producer Hilary Manning, I was given no idea of what they really had in mind. Had they said: ‘Oh hi, we’re planning to rip off your book *This House is Haunted*, and we’d like your name at the top of the credits to give the impression that you approved of the programme’, I would have declined the offer. I accepted the fee (and the out-of-court settlement) because I didn’t get where I am today by working for nothing.” (FT175:72, Oct 2003).

As literary executor to the Playfair estate, I have access to Playfair’s file on the matter. This confirms he was shown a copy of a script entitled ‘*Noddies*’ by Stephen Volk, dated 5 June 1992. Guy was not consulted on what took place afterwards with the *Ghostwatch* script and the programme as actually broadcast. It was over this that he duly sued (*Playfair v British Broadcasting*



Listening in

I visited Bryn Celli Ddu burial chamber in Anglesey on 16 June 2018. I’ve been a couple of times before and there have been various objects

reverently placed there – candles, mistletoe etc. This time there were shells and three extraordinary objects: plaster casts of oyster shells with a plaster cast human ear inside. Can anyone explain the symbolism? **Graeme Kenna**, by email

Corporation, Case No 9329425, Willesden County Court, 23 Dec 1992) in an action for copyright infringement, including in the particulars of claim some 20 specific instances of use of copyright material without permission. The BBC settled quickly, less than two months later, paying out for what Playfair subsequently called in less legalistic terms “a set up” and being “ripped off” (see *Psychic News*, 23 April 1994).

Maurice Grosse, the other leading Enfield Poltergeist investigator, was present during the live broadcast of *Ghostwatch*. He attended at the invitation of the producer, to supervise the telephonists at the television centre who were taking real calls from viewers. Grosse stated: “I did this in the hope that as people were supposed to ring in to tell of their own paranormal experiences, I might pick up some genuine cases for investigation.” (Letter in *The Psi Researcher*, no.8, 1993).

Of the evening, Grosse stated: “I must say that, contrary to reports in the press, I was not an adviser on the film. My involvement was to introduce the producer to people who had experienced positive psychic activity. The film was originally supposed to portray interviews with these people, but this idea was dropped, except for the young man shown with his face obliterated relating incidents on a case I investigated in

NW London. I was in no way privy to the content of the film, which throughout production was a closely guarded secret.

“Concerning the content, I have very mixed feelings on the matter. I was certainly unhappy to discover that sections of it were unashamedly appropriated from the Enfield Poltergeist Case. Even the voice recordings of the ‘poltergeist’ were a thinly disguised paraphrase of my recordings of the real voice experienced at Enfield. When I tackled both the producer and the author on this plagiarism, I was met with sheepish grins, certainly no denial. The researcher was more forthcoming on this point. She had previously agreed that the Enfield case was the role model.”

Alan Murdie

Bournemouth, Dorset

Ain’t half hot

I would like to commend Ian L’Anson for his back-of-the-envelope calculation of the energy involved in spontaneous human combustion [FT368:75]. This was based on the fat in the body (about 1,000 kJ) and the energy required to vaporise the body’s water (about 20,000 kJ). This sort of quick sanity-check calculation is a very valuable habit. However, the assumption that fat is the only meaningful energy source in the body is incorrect. If the whole

body burns, it is all used as fuel, and by most estimates the corresponding energy released is two orders of magnitude larger, about 300,000 kJ/person. (Note that the common figure of around 100,000 kJ/person is only for the energy in skeletal muscle.) Conversely, he has neglected to add the latent heat of vaporisation for the body’s water once it has reached boiling point, about 2,000 kJ/kg x 70 kg = 140,000 kJ. The totals are therefore around 160,000 kJ to vaporise all the water in the body and 300,000 kJ in fuel with which to do it, so thermodynamically speaking, the process works.

All the other oddities remain, of course.

Alexander Whiteside

Cambridge

The report on the death of Rosa Jarionaca in Peru [FT368:80] ends: “When we went to examine the corpse, we couldn’t find anything,” said an official. ‘Everything was ash.’” Whoa! That’s a spontaneous human combustion result. Is this just an excuse for official laziness or has someone in Peru discovered how to mix the right mushrooms and induce SHC? I have always felt that “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire” does not apply to SHC, and that it’s a very destructive biochemical reaction.

Hugh Henry

By email

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

Spooklight at the university

Back in 2004, an article by David Hambling about marsh gas [FT180:14] prompted my father and I to write about his experience with a mysterious green light ("Tennessee Spooklights", FT188:74). My father died in 2012, but during the last years of his life, he often spoke about seeing the weird floating light, and even painted a picture of it. Having been a physician with an interest in science, he always felt there had to be a rational explanation for what he had seen. Now another article by David Hambling, "Swamp gas and corpse candles" [FT370:14], prompts me to write again with a spooklight tale of my own. Perhaps my family has an affinity for them.

I work for an evolutionary biologist on the campus of a state university. At around 3pm on 13 June 2017 I was in the office of Dr Marple (not his real name) on the first floor of the campus humanities building. Finals and graduation were over, and the halls of the building were empty at that hour. My desk, although in the front of the office near the hall, was tucked behind the door, so I couldn't see directly outside without getting up. Dr Marple was at work in the back part of the office at the computer, against the opposite wall, which had a clear view out the hallway directly into the open classroom across from us. This room was empty and, although it was a bright sunny day outside, only dimly lit by light filtering through a large, fully-leaved tree about 6ft (1.8m) outside the picture window that took up the entire northeast wall facing the street.

Late in the afternoon, we often chatted as we worked. That day, I turned my chair to my right, towards Dr Marple in the interior of the office, and said, "Last week, I left here and went to visit my friend Andrew in the hospital, and today, I'm going to his funeral." Almost before the



words were out of my mouth, Dr Marple looked over my shoulder, towards the hallway, and said in a most alarmed tone of voice, "What is that?" He stood up, and without saying anything else, began to stride quickly past me towards the door behind and to my left.

I turned to follow his gaze, but couldn't see exactly what he was looking at beyond the door. I noticed only a lovely pastel-coloured flickering on the door frame, mostly pale blue but with some other colours, possibly pale violet and green, which I can only liken to the shimmering reflections of the Sun underwater in a swimming pool. I followed him across the hallway and into the empty classroom where, nestled at eye level or a little above in the green branches directly outside the picture window, we both saw a very brilliant bluish-white light, almost too intense to look at, yet which didn't hurt my eyes. I remember the shimmering, flickering colours on the walls around us, but not the shadows being cast, nor the room being brightly lit. The light was blinking on and

"We saw a brilliant bluish-white light, almost too intense to look at..."

off, about one second on, then one second off, with extreme regularity. We silently walked through the classroom, around the empty chairs, right up to the window, looking at the light all the time. It appeared to be very close. I wasn't frightened, really, just concerned. It was completely silent, and seemed quite real. At the moment I reached the window, a few seconds after Dr Marple, it blinked out for good. I believe it blinked maybe 10 to 15 times, although Dr Marple must have seen a few more blinks than I did.

We discussed the experience several times, looking for some explanation. For several days after it happened, I noticed workmen busy installing a camera on a streetlight that overlooked a parking lot across the street from where we worked. Sitting in Dr Marple's computer chair,

as I often did, this 30ft (9m)-tall streetlight appeared directly lined up with the branch in which the light had apparently nestled. But the only part of the streetlight I could see from the computer chair was the base, since the leaves near the window were so thick. Could the streetlight have possibly gone on the fritz and blinked on in daylight – much brighter than its orangey mercury vapour light at night – brightly enough to be seen through the branches of the tree? It didn't seem likely to me. I even asked the workmen if anything on the streetlight or the camera could cause a bright light, but they just looked oddly at me and said no. And anyway, when I retraced our steps, keeping my eye on the base of the light pole, its position moved constantly in relation to the branches as I walked across the hall and through the classroom. The light we saw did not move and appeared very close to the window. (However, I should point out that Dr Marple prefers to believe that some malfunction of the streetlight caused the light we saw.)

It didn't even occur to me until later that the light might have been connected with my friend Andrew, a former monk and a deeply spiritual person, although also irascible and highly opinionated. At the time we saw the light in the window, psalms were being prayed over his body at a local Russian Orthodox church, but I find it amusing that he might have decided to make a final appearance as "a mischievous supernatural being", to quote Mr Hambling.

A final note: during the week after the experience, leaves on the branch where we had seen the light turned yellow and died. And only 20 or so yards away, across the street next to the parking lot, lies the old Confederate Cemetery, now fallen into disrepair as the city has ceased caring for it due to recent political protests.

Julia Morgan-Scott
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Strange light over Baldock

I read with interest Jerry Glover's 'Aylesbury Vale Encounter' [FT370:77]. Living in the vicinity, I am aware that at Cardington Hangers, near Bedford, they are developing a new airship called Airlander. Might that be what he saw?

On 4 September 2018 my husband and I both saw something at Baldock, Hertfordshire, that we cannot explain. It was a mild, dry, still night and we were taking the dog for her bedtime walk. At 10.05pm my husband pointed out a white light behind some scudding clouds. I responded that it was the Moon (but the Moon was not scheduled to rise until later that night) – or the headlights of an aeroplane heading for Luton Airport, some 15 miles (24km) distant. As we watched, the light changed from white to blue to indigo and a laser-like beam from the light headed down towards the ground. We couldn't see the ground as the light was behind houses. We thought it might be a laser show from Royston or one of the villages in the distance, but as we watched, the light moved at speed in an anti-clockwise arc sweeping around and coming to rest approx 180 degrees opposite where we first saw it, over Letchworth Garden City. The light remained indigo in colour and began to flash intermittently about 10 times before disappearing. When we looked back to where it had come from we noted the sky was clear, not a cloud in sight.

We considered it might be a laser show, but it was a weekday night and this wouldn't explain the angle of the sweep; there was no aeroplane or helicopter sounds and no activity shown when my husband checked the plane-finder on his phone. There were no emergency vehicles on the adjacent A505 that we were aware of, and the passage of the light did not match the layout of the road. As the light moved, a Great Northern electric train went, nonstop, through Baldock station from Cambridge to Kings Cross, but the start of the light was not following the railway line, which was too far to the right. Could it have been a drone? We got the impression the light was coming from a

large bright source with a beam – do drones have these and how would it travel the distance? We estimate four to five miles at least.

Or was it an optical illusion? That the light changed colour in line with the spectrum would point towards this, but why the flashes and instant disappearing rather than fading as a rainbow would do? Also, why did the scudding clouds all disappear so quickly to give a clear starry night, not a cloud in sight? Unfortunately we didn't see anyone else out on our walk to corroborate what we saw. It was all very strange.

Sharon Cooper
By email

Levitating discs

On 12 July 2012, my three children were playing in the garden in Harlow, Essex, while I was cooking dinner. My oldest child came running into the kitchen:

"Daddy, there's something above our house!" I rushed into the garden and looked up to see two disc-shaped objects moving very fast in a zigzag manner. They were going straight up and down, and so remained above the house. I rushed inside to grab my video camera, but when I got back outside I couldn't see the objects. My children said, "They just shot straight up in the sky and vanished!" I left the camera outside and returned to the kitchen. After about a minute the lights flickered and my ears started to pop. I was drawn outside and looked up. I saw nothing at first, then suddenly a black dot appeared in the sky – very high, as high as you could see. I turned on my camera and started to focus on the black dot. It looked like a sort of huge plughole as inside the blackness a grey circle was spinning. Then two bright dots came out and plummeted towards us very fast until we could see they were the same two discs we had seen before. At this point my children became very scared



and I told them to go inside. I filmed the discs the best I could, but this time they were moving much faster and it was hard to keep them in focus. Besides, I was shaking like a leaf. They remained in view for a few minutes and then I noticed the black dot reappear high above them. In a split second the discs shot straight up towards the black hole and vanished inside. Then the black dot just disappeared. I stood there for a moment still filming when I noticed all the dogs in the neighbourhood were barking like crazy. When I went back indoors my children and I watched the footage I had filmed. We could clearly see the discs and even the black hole. There was a knock at the front door. It was my next-door neighbour, who had witnessed the strange sighting and had heard us all screaming in the garden. I showed her the footage. I contacted the local newspaper (*Harlow Star*), which sent someone round. After they had viewed the footage they contacted the local TV station (Anglia TV)

who sent three people round. After they had viewed the footage they interviewed me on film and asked if they could take my footage away with them and have their experts look at it. I was reluctant to give it to them, as it was the only copy. After this strange event I felt I was changed in some way and a series of events have transpired that have indeed changed my life. I kept having a recurring dream that seemed to suggest to me to do something. That something turned out to be writing a song and making a film about what had happened. Both are called 'Dreamland' (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4Q6Bkykv5c>).

Karl Heard
Harlow, Essex

Helping hands

In October 2011 my mum was travelling in Jordan, when due to a mix-up, she ended up in a different hotel from the one she'd

originally booked. She stayed for a night, enough time to befriend the owner, who at one point complained about her bad back. As my mum has some medical expertise, she gave her some physio for it, and left the following morning, catching a taxi back to the airport and the UK.

Rewind.

The previous August, thousands of miles away, I was taking one of my endless cycle rides into oblivion, to get over a relationship split. One night, returning from Walton-on-Thames, about 20 miles from home, my old iron warhorse of a bike finally gave up the ghost and died. At 4am in Kingston – a long way from London. I was utterly distraught. The streets were deserted. If a cab didn't come along, and soon, it was going to be a very long walk back to town.

Fast-Forward.

In November, the Jordanian hotel owner, visiting London, treated my mum to lunch, to hook up again, and thank her for the physio. Over the course of the meal, they exchanged some family details, and what have you.

Rewind.

Back in Kingston, back in August, I'd finally flagged down the only black cab prepared to stop for me, and help ferry my wretched bicycle back to the Capital. It was a kindly, middle-aged Arab guy, and as we had a long journey back to London, we got chatting – about ourselves, our careers, our names, families, my mixed-race heritage (I'm half Arabic) etc. As he dropped me at my door, he accepted only what I had in my pocket – rather less than the actual fare would have been, and furthermore, spent the next 20 minutes attempting to fix my bike himself, gamely muddying his hands on the greasy chain.

Fast-Forward. Late November 2011.

My mum received an email from her new friend, containing some news neither of us would ever forget. The week before, while chatting with her husband, who occasionally works in London as a cab driver, she mentioned my mum and myself to him etc. And he suddenly exclaimed, "My goodness! That's the guy I picked up in my taxi last August!"

Ali Catterall
By email

Fortean Traveller



114. The National Leprechaun Museum, Dublin

NIGEL WATSON takes a deep dive into the folklore of Ireland when he visits an unusual – and highly enjoyable – museum devoted to the Little People

My first visit to Dublin this year. But what to do? Obviously got to have a pint or two of Guinness. The guide books provide a fantastic listing of art galleries, shopping centres, restaurants, bars, historical landmarks and museums; but what catches the eye of any self-respecting fortean is the mention of the National Leprechaun Museum.

After a long drive to Cardiff Airport, a short flight to Dublin, a bus trip to the city centre and a short walk, I found myself, as if by magic, on the corner of Jervis Street and Abbey Street Upper, outside the museum's HQ at Twilfit House, being welcomed by the Chief Leprechaun; sorry, I mean Mark O'Géaraín, Experience Manager of this unusual establishment.

I was not too sure what to expect, being aware that the National Leprechaun Museum had faced its share of controversy. When it opened in March 2010, it was met with a good deal of derision for being an expensive project launched at just the time when the 'Celtic Tiger' economy was facing a massive downturn. Furthermore, it was derided for reinforcing Irish stereotypes. Brian Twomey, head of marketing and communications for Ireland's tourism bureau, went so far as to say: "It is a derogatory symbol from an Irish perspective."¹

In its defence, leading Irish folklorist Daithí Ó hÓgáin said: "This is not reinforcing stereotypes. We can surely move on from what other people outside the country think. The museum has both a comical and a serious element, and there is enough seriousness in Ireland at the moment as it is."²



TOP: The Museum's home. CENTRE: Mark O'Géaraín and friend. ABOVE: Visitors can experience life at leprechaun size.

Before having a chat with Mark, I joined one of the scheduled tours of the museum, which begins in a gallery of leprechaun-related advertising, books, ornaments, historical references, news stories and movie posters.

Our guide Emily points out that one of the most important influences on our modern-day perception of the Leprechaun is the 1959 Walt Disney movie *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*, directed by Robert Stevenson. This was the outcome of Disney's long-nurtured desire to produce something that touched on his Irish ancestry. It is the story of an old codger called Darby O'Gill who enlists the help of the king of the leprechauns. Its cultural impact was to help fix the image of a leprechaun as a small person dressed in a green coat and hat, whereas in the past he was usually regarded as wearing a red jacket with a number of regional variations.

A similar, and perhaps equally influential, image of the leprechaun emerged with the introduction of Lucky Charms breakfast cereal, which since its launch in 1964 has used the character of 'Lucky the Leprechaun' prominently in its advertising.³

After this crash-course in leprechaun cultural studies, the tour then proceeds through a miraculous tunnel where



ABOVE LEFT: At the end of the rainbow, the traditional pot of gold awaits. **BELOW:** It's a theme picked up in some of the artwork created by young visitors to the museum.

you get the experience of being shrunk to the size of a leprechaun and find yourself in a room full of giant furniture. From there, you go on a journey through rooms that evoke the darkness and mystery of Ireland and its long storytelling traditions and links with the ancient past.

In these spooky settings our guide enthral us with stories of the little people and their relationship with humanity. They tend to avoid humans and live near fairy rings or in hills, where they mend shoes and are associated with pots of gold. If you meet one, you will find he is a tricky and mischievous character who can easily outwit you. They do follow rules that dictate their behaviour; for example, they cannot tell a lie, they have to keep a promise, and if you capture one he will grant you three wishes or great wealth on the condition you let him go. Leprechauns, much like other fairy folk, are also known to kidnap children and replace them with their own sickly offspring, and they have a deep fear of iron.

Filled with such tales you then pass through the specially constructed rainbow, where a pot of gold is waiting for you at the end.

In the gift shop – packed with leprechaun-related souvenirs and in the shadow of a giant ‘stereotypical’ leprechaun, ideal for a photo opportunity – Mark told me how this unique museum was the brainchild of Irish furniture designer Tom

You can take a trip into the dark side of Irish folklore

O’Rahilly. It took Tom seven years from the germ of an idea to getting funding and creating the setting where the concept, mythology and legends of the leprechaun could be displayed, acted out and understood as an oral tradition reaching back into ancient history.

Mark points out that these stories of leprechauns and fairies were a way of explaining features in the landscape, such as the impressive Giant’s Causeway, or ancient structures like the 5,000-year-old stone age passage tomb at Newgrange. They are also a half-remembered memory of ancient groups and peoples who inhabited Ireland in the mists of mythology. This mythology tells us that Ireland was ruled by Kings and Queens, the Tuatha Dé Danann (the people of the goddess Danu) who co-existed with fairy folk called the Daonine Sidhe. This harmony was disrupted by the invasion of the Gaels, who conquered the Tuatha Dé Danann and forced the fairies, including the leprechauns, to hide from human sight. The association of gold with leprechauns seems to have come about when the

Danes invaded Ireland and, on departing, hid their plunder in the Irish countryside, leaving it for the leprechauns to guard.

Leprechauns also helped people to make sense of things in their everyday life, such as poor crop yields or bad luck in general; and in the case of changelings and sickly children, they offer an explanation for illness and post-natal depression.

Mark says the majority of leprechauns are male, with female leprechauns seemingly having no place in modern stories. Yet, we do find them as far back as the eighth century in the tale ‘The Death of King Fergus’, a story of a king in the north of Ireland who is the first to encounter a leprechaun. He goes on to meet King Lubdán and Queen Bébo, who were the rulers of Faylinn, the mythical island where the Lú Córpaín (meaning small bodied and the origin of the name leprechaun) come from.

Disney did a good job with his *Darby O’Gill and the Little People*, but, as Mark says, a lot of leprechaun stories are not suitable for children. This has led him to introduce ‘Dark Land’ guided tours on Friday and Saturday nights, for adults only. As the name suggests, these tours take you on a trip into the dark side of Irish folklore.

The museum employs about 10 regular storytelling guides, who go on visits to leprechaun-related locations and have monthly meetings in a pub to

exchange stories and hone their skills.

At its heart the museum provides a wonderful setting for storytelling and evoking a strong sense of how these stories were originally transmitted around the firesides of isolated farms and cottages. It creates a timeless, magical experience that transcends stereotypes and takes your imagination to the mythical past, where leprechauns and fairies still roamed the countryside.

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♦ **NIGEL WATSON** is a regular contributor to *FT* and the author of *UFOs of the First World War* and *The UFO Investigations Manual*.

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

THE VAMPIRE RABBIT OF NEWCASTLE
Featuring THE FAT SLAGS out of VIZ

HUNT EMERSON with ROB GANDY

BRAM STOKER TELLS OF HOW DRACULA CAME TO WHITBY ON THE SHIP DEMETER, IN THE FORM OF A LARGE DOG!



NOT TRUE! HE TOOK THE FORM OF A RABBIT! NOT LIKING THE LOOK OF WHITBY, HE HEADED NORTH ON THE A1 TO NEWCASTLE...



HE SOUGHT OUT PARTS OF THE CITY FREQUENTED BY CREATURES OF THE NIGHT!



AND, BECAUSE HE WAS A VAMPIRE RABBIT, HE BIT ONE OF THEM...



COMING NEXT MONTH



SCARY SWEETMEATS

THE DARK LORE BEHIND THE
GINGERBREAD HOUSE



PLANT OF POWER

THE MYTHOLOGY AND MAGIC
OF MISTLETOE



A DARTMOOR OGRE,
FORT DOWN UNDER,
QUEEN MARY'S TREE,
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 374

ON SALE 6 DEC 2018

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A traditional healer in Nigeria's south-eastern Imo state died after one of his clients tested his "bullet-proof" charm on him. Chinaka Adoezuwe, 26, prepared the 'Odieshi' amulet for the client, but he refused to wear it. Adoezuwe then put it around his own neck and handed the client a gun to prove it was effective. He was shot and killed. The unfortunate client was arrested on suspicion of murder. There have been several reports of people being killed after testing "bullet-proof" charms and medicines. In January, a traditional medicine seller was arrested after a man drank a "bullet-repelling" liquid and was shot dead. The seller in north-western Nigeria reportedly assured the man that he could not die if he was shot. *BBC News, 5 July; Sun, 6 July 2018.*

A newly married Indian woman was allegedly burnt alive on a funeral pyre after doctors mistakenly thought she had died from a lung infection. Rachna Sisodia, 24, was pronounced dead at Sharda hospital in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, on 25 February 2017. A day later, her husband, Devesh Chaudhary, 23, and some friends arranged a funeral pyre and began to cremate her; but she was dragged off the pyre by police after someone claimed she was still alive. However, it was too late. A post-mortem exam found charred particles in her windpipe and lungs, suggesting she had still been breathing. The conclusion was that she had died from "shock caused by being burnt alive". However, the case is far from clear-cut. Medics at Sharda hospital stood by their verdict and Dr Pankaj Mishra, who conducted the post-mortem, was quoted by the *Times of India* as saying that he could not be sure that the body was Rachna's due to the extent of burning. And Chaudhary said he believed attempts were being made to frame him for his wife's murder. *D.Telegraph, 3 Mar; (Queensland) Courier-Mail, 4 Mar 2017.*

Russian police arrested a woman, referred to only as Lydia, who had dumped the partly mummified and cannibalised body of her common-law husband near swings and a playground in Yekaterinburg, eastern Russia. She then stripped naked and told onlookers that she had been eating her husband, but had decided to take him outside because he had started to smell. The face of the partly mummified body – identified as Vladimir, 68, a former prison officer – had been "gnawed" and his legs

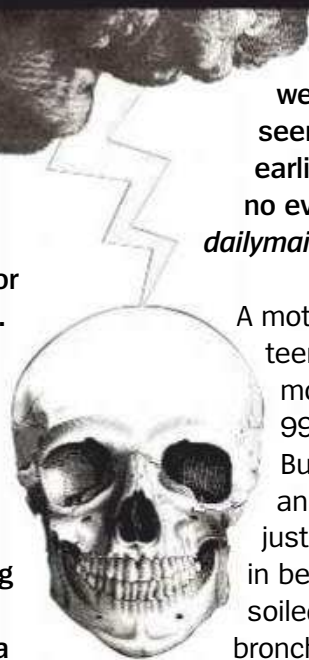
were missing. He had last been seen alive around three weeks earlier. Detectives said there was no evidence he had been murdered. *dailymail.co.uk, 3 Aug 2018.*

A mother and grandmother let a teenager "rot to death" over six months. After his mother called 999, paramedics found Jordan Burling, 18, lying lifelessly on an inflatable mattress, weighing just 84lb (38kg). He was covered in bedsores and was wearing a soiled nappy when he died of acute bronchopneumonia at his home in the Farnley area of Leeds on 30 June 2016. The decomposed remains of a full-term baby boy, Jordan's brother, were found hidden in a rucksack in a bedroom cupboard, where it had been for 14 years. Dawn Cranston, 45, and her mother Denise Cranston, 70, were convicted of manslaughter at Leeds Crown Court on 10 July 2018. The mother was jailed for four years and the grandmother for three. Jordan's sister Abigail, 25, got 18 months for not telling anyone what was happening. *D.Mail, 7 June, 11+13 July; D.Telegraph, 11 July; Sun, 13 July 2018.*

Linda Farr, 68, killed her housebound mother through neglect by leaving her stricken in a chair for a year. Doreen Shufflebotham, 86, had a fractured and infected leg, artery blockage, sepsis, deep vein thrombosis and acute bacterial meningitis. Farr, of Hanley, Stoke, was arrested three days after her mother died. She escaped with a 20-month sentence, suspended for two years. *Sun, 25 April 2018.*

Duane Youd was arrested on 13 August after he was seen assaulting his wife Sandy in a Utah canyon, where they had gone to talk about their marital problems. A few hours later, the experienced pilot borrowed a twin-engine Cessna 525 from his employer and at 2.30am crashed it into the front of his house in Payson, near Salt Lake City, where Sandy and their child were sleeping. Both survived the incident, which caused the front of the house to become engulfed in flames; Youd, however, did not. *theweek.co.uk, 14 Aug; Sun, 15 Aug 2018.*

Erik Larsen Fjordvald, 61, died after being hit in the throat by a metal tent peg propelled by high winds while packing up his tent in Thy, northwest Norway, on 10 August. *Middlesbrough Eve. Gazette, 14 Aug 2018.*



Cosy Crime Pays For Indy Author

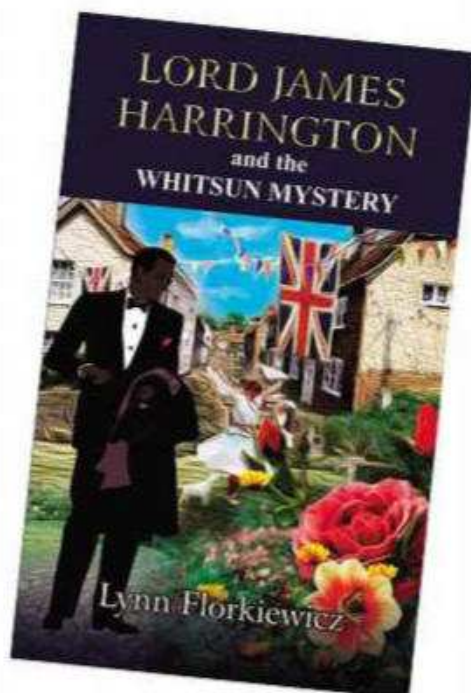
Lynn Florkiewicz's dream of being a writer began when she was just six years old, but it had to sit on the back-burner until, at the age of 45, she took a creative writing course with The Writers Bureau, and started out on a whole new adventure...

Avid reading as a child laid the foundation for Lynn's love of mystery and crime stories, and she always imagined that one day she'd write her own. When she grew up though, marriage and a promising career as a singer/songwriter on the British and American folk circuits gave her little time to pursue writing until, after a bout of particularly debilitating illness, she decided it was time to bring it to the fore.

Lynn enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Creative Writing Course back in 2001. She worked steadily through its 20 tutor-marked assignments, earning her course fees back from published work and getting placed/highly commended in several writing competitions along the way. Confidence thoroughly boosted, she then decided to try writing a children's adventure story - *The Quest for the Crystal Skulls*, of which, BBC Springwatch's Michaela Strachen said: 'There are many ways to create awareness about what we're doing to planet Earth, I found this an incredibly powerful and compelling one. I read it in one go.' (*The Quest for the Crystal Skulls* is available from Amazon and Penpress Partnership Book Publishing).

Inspired by a long-time love of cosy crime (Agatha Christie, Carola Dunn etc), Lynn's next move was to follow her

childhood dream and create her own murder-mystery series. And so it was that Lord James Harrington, country landowner, ex-racing driver and amateur sleuth, was born. When her first whodunit, *The Winter Mystery*, was launched on Kindle it received a plethora of five-star reviews from cosy crime fans, and that was all the encouragement Lynn needed to write more.



Five years on, and Lord James Harrington is a well-established character with his name on eight book covers. Lynn is already in the process of writing a ninth, with plans to release a new mystery every year. The books are all available from Amazon in Kindle, print and audio format, as well as from Lord Harrington's very own



Lynn Florkiewicz

website: www.lordjamesharrington.com.

'I've created a world that I adore and I love to slip into that imaginary community and meet up with my characters,' says Lynn. 'I am not a literary writer. I'm not here to change the world or make you think, I want to entertain people and, from the feedback I've received, I tick that box.'

Recently, Lord James Harrington was picked-up by Magna Publishing (part of Ulverscroft). They intend to release the whole series in audio and large print formats, and already, the American Audio File Magazine has awarded the first of these recordings with an Earphone Audio Award.

Lynn is just one of many Writers Bureau students who have found their way to publishing success. So if you harbour a dream to write, they can help. Their courses provide students with a professional writer as a personal tutor and cover all types of writing, as well as teaching the business side of being an author. To request free details, contact The Writers Bureau at: www.writersbureau.com or call - 0800 856 2008. Quote ATT18 You'll be glad you did!

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
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